



Beyond Transition:
Appalachia's
Pathway to Justice
and Transformation

March 2021

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Dedication from the Highlander Center

Elandria Williams (E)/ 1979-2020

This report is dedicated in memoriam to **Elandria Williams (E)** who inspires us to expand our vision of what is possible and who taught us that transformative justice is embodied in radical love and revolutionary practice. As an Education Team Co-Coordinator at the Highlander Research and Education Center, E brought the Appalachian Transition Fellowship to life and nurtured its emerging leaders and New Economies work in the region with mentorship, political and popular education, and community care. Our souls and bodies yearn for a world that E inspired so many to imagine. Our commitments are to keep building that world and to tend to one another while we do, because that's what E has asked us to do.



WE ARE WORTHY

We are worthy
Not because of what we produce
But because of who we are
We are divine bodies of light and darkness
You are not worthy because of what you offer,
not because of what is in your mind, not for the support you give others,
not for what you give at all
We are worthy and are whole just because
In this great turning, in this great pandemic,
in this radical readjustment and alignment
We are not disposable, we are needed, we are the
very people that have withstood everything that has been thrown at us as a
people and as Maya Angelou would say
Still I Rise
We arise from the pain
We rise from the grief
We arise from the limits people place on us and
the limits we place on ourselves
We rise to be the children and the ancestors
We rise to be our true selves
Our true selves in relationship to our families
and communities
Recognizing our liberating and whole selves
Honoring them and others as we strive for
abundant communities, abundant lives, abundant relationships, and
abundant
values and cultural manifestations
We are worthiness personified
I, you, and we are worthy and deserve a life
where we are not always fighting for our existence

- ELANDRIA WILLIAMS

Imagine what we could create if we were not always in the struggle
Imagine what we could envision if we could just be let to just go there
So tired of always having to resist, to fight, demanding, pushing
To everyone that has the courage, the power, the
ability to co-create what we want and need
while rooting in what we can't lose and who we are
You are the visionary
You are the hope
You are our ancestors dreams
No you might not ever end up on some list somewhere
But you are on a list in someone's heart and mind
And if it's in how you move in the world so people can see by example
You are the embodiment of what we need
Thanks to all that are the embodiment
The embodiment not of productivity but
the embodiment of radical love, care and sanctuary
It's time
Embodiment time
Embodiment
Living ones values out loud
Let me everyday live my values out loud
Let us everyday live our values out loud
Embodying our values
Not the productivity quotient
Beyond productivity
Past productivity
True embodiment
Life





Highlander Framing Statement

This statement was developed by Elizabeth Wright, Kierra Sims, and Allyn Maxfield-Steele.

In 2012, seeds were planted for what would later become the Appalachian Transition Fellowship program at the Highlander Research and Education Center. In a process led at Highlander by Elandria Williams, Kierra Sima, and Susan Williams, we worked with regional stakeholders, community allies, and philanthropic partners to participate in a series of listening sessions examining economic transition in the region and identifying priorities to advance that work through just, sustainable practices. The outcome of that process highlighted the need for a leadership program in Central Appalachia that prioritized Appalachian people as experts of their own experiences, supported emerging and youth leadership, and increased capacity for this work on the ground.

Other values threaded throughout the listening sessions included having a leadership program that: facilitated cross-sector partnerships, prioritized economic solutions independent of coal, and started to develop a concrete analysis and plan for an economic transition away from extractive industries, ecological devastation, profound wealth and health disparities, and scarcity mindsets around resources.

Highlander staff worked with regional partners to design an innovative program to meet these needs and by 2014, the first of three Appalachian Transition Fellowship (AppFellows) cohorts was underway. By 2019, AppFellows came to a close having supported 32 emerging leaders in paid, year-long fellowships and 88 Appalachian organizations across sectors and issues, boosting capacity for community-led projects advancing a “just transition.” Over the program’s 5-year implementation, it was led by Elandria Williams, Kierra Sims, Elizabeth Wright, Charice Starr, and Abby Huggins, with support from Joe Tolbert.

Each cohort was independently evaluated, with lessons and opportunities shaping each subsequent year’s implementation. As the fellowship program concluded, Highlander set out to inform the next phase of our work in the region, assessing how the “just transition” framework was shifting systems and building power and what capacity and support was still needed to build on the learnings and impact from the previous five years. While discussing what we needed to learn, we wanted to unpack some of the challenges voiced by participants during the AppFellows implementation, especially a need to dig deeper into the idea of “just transition” as a framework

For more information about this project or the Highlander Center's work in Central Appalachia, please contact Elizabeth Wright at elizabeth@highlandercenter.org.

and guiding principle for collective liberation. Fellows regularly shared frustrations with what felt like a short-sighted vision of economic transition in a region whose history and economic success included Indigenous communities' removal and oppression, anti-Black violence, and corporate domination while also holding a history of resistance that too often has gone ignored.

In March 2019, Highlander's main administrative building burned to the ground. After discovering that a white power symbol had been spray painted in the adjacent parking lot, Highlander remains convinced that the fire was an arson by white supremacists. This attack further increased the urgency behind the need for public, raw conversations that centered race and class, within a "just transition" in Appalachia. We keep (and will continue) asking: **How can we talk about a new economy in Appalachia without directly addressing and confronting the overt, organized white supremacy that plagues our region today—not just in the past?**

Almost a year after the attack at Highlander, the intersecting crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the relentless state-sanctioned assault on Black lives shook the world and **also elevated the need to further dissect the meaning of "just transition" within Central Appalachia.**

The insurrection by white nationalists, including elected officials and their allies, at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 only reinforced our analysis that the threats posed by organized white supremacy are real and embedded in our government institutions. It is imperative that we not only address this external threat, but that we dismantle white supremacy within ourselves and our own institutions, preserve democratic, community-led processes and practices, and invest the needed resources and capacity to accelerate this work.

Within the first several weeks of this assessment's process, the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in the United States. The priorities identified and addressed by many in our region during this assessment have become even more critical to our survival and even more threatened in the midst of the pandemic. Intersecting and overlapping realities

for Appalachian communities have intensified during the pandemic: lack of access to affordable health care, under-resourced or non-existent rural health care facilities, food insecurity, high rates of addiction, unemployment, lack of broadband, and income and wealth disparities. We have witnessed the federal government's staunch refusal to address the public health crisis and the systematic dismantling of public services, increasing the vulnerability of Appalachian communities for decades to come.

The war on Black people in the United States and globally is also happening right here in Central Appalachia, and it has been for a long time. Forced removal of Indigenous people by white settlement paved the way for centuries of different forms of violence against Black, Indigenous, and Brown Appalachian people. Overt and implicit efforts to depict Appalachia as "white and rural" have threatened to erase the memories and cultures of vibrant Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities across the region. Law enforcement agents in this region harass and murder Black, Indigenous, and Brown folks at alarming rates and exact other forms of state violence, like deportations and targeted arrests of activists, at similarly high rates. COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting Black and Brown people in our region who are dying at rates two to three times that of white people exposed to the disease, further spotlighting the historic impacts of capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy and a monolithic economy on the ability to access basic human rights and needs in the present day. Put simply, what we have witnessed in 2020 are intersecting violations of human rights that make it impossible to understand "just transition" in Central Appalachia and the United States simply as matters of climate change and environmental problems. In overlooking how the historical trajectory of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy have shaped the lived realities of regular people in Central Appalachia, we are upholding the foundational injustices upon which the problem of "just transition" sits. The issues run much deeper and make the problem of transition all the more dire.

In Appalachia, we have seen the just transition framework and initiatives deepen, expand, and push through growing pains as the economic conditions of

our region shift alongside the political, economic, and social conditions nationally and globally. We know that our capitalist economy is rooted in institutionalized racism and builds wealth off the bodies, labor, and land of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. This same strategy of extracting wealth and resources from communities and exploiting the labor of working people to build that wealth has shaped the Appalachian region. Although the root causes are the same, the symptoms look different in Appalachia. For instance, COVID-19, a virus that attacks the respiratory and nervous systems, poses a unique threat in Appalachia due to a large portion of people's health being previously compromised by the coal industry. Some community members were already struggling with Black Lung and other respiratory diseases. Others were already experiencing the side effects of living with long-term water contamination, air pollution, and contaminated soil. COVID-19 is further exacerbating a system that was already broken.

Highlander advances transformative justice, working to dismantle white supremacy and capitalism while supporting grassroots efforts to create new systems and solidarity economies that build power and leadership among directly impacted people and communities. Each cohort of the Appalachian Transition Fellowship reported a struggle in being rooted in these values and principles at Highlander while living and working in communities where just transition efforts often mimicked capitalist enterprise, practiced gentrification, upheld white supremacy, and tokenized young leaders and People of Color. The need for unpacking this recurring sentiment is the foundation of this report.

As is true for all liberation work, we know that a just transition is a process and not a destination. We remain committed to an ongoing process of engagement, assessment, and adjustment of our strategies for change while learning from new information and changing conditions, learning from our mistakes and victories, and always examining where power is being held. We will fight to make sure that just transition work is truly collective and that it is a full transition from the profit-centered conditions we inherited to conditions that will allow all people to

survive and thrive, moving beyond transition toward transformation.

From 2020-2021, Highlander worked with Dialogue + Design Associates to develop and anchor this listening and assessment process to learn more about the values and principles embedded in just transition work throughout Central Appalachia. We embarked on a journey to unpack transition vs. transformation, to examine the values and principles underlying just transition efforts in the region, and to learn what opportunities exist to deepen the "justice" in the region's work to not only transition our economies, lives, and communities away from harm, but to transform our economies, lives, and communities toward truly sustainable systems of care and collective liberation.

This process and its goals are highly informed by social justice work happening throughout Appalachia for many years — thanks to the leadership of Black, Brown, Indigenous, low- and no-income, young, and Queer people in our region. In this assessment, we sought to learn from these leaders and those who have led just transition efforts in our region to get more clear about what we are transitioning toward and how we can get there through values and principles rooted in collective liberation. It is vital that Appalachians remember and carry forward the solidarity in linked struggles for collective liberation that are a key part of our rich radical history. Our futures toward a truly just transition depend on it.

The information gathered will help Highlander understand where our support is needed moving forward. Our intention is to take these lessons and continue to build capacity and collaboration in the region to strengthen these muscles toward transformative justice. We will continue to engage directly impacted folks in our region with the stories and strategies shared here to facilitate conversations and ongoing commitments to ground this work regionally in visionary principles. We hope you'll do the same in your community and join us in building together in solidarity, creating new systems of care that honor the abundant resources and resourcefulness of our region, and expanding our beliefs of what is possible in Central Appalachia by building wealth and well-being for all our communities and all who create them.

Highlander Center staff engaged with the same questions asked of those who contributed to this assessment. Together, we lifted up the following values and principles for our own work supporting transformative justice in Central Appalachia.

1 We must honor the people that came before us when working toward a just transition. Appalachia comprises land of the Cherokee, Shawnee, Catawba, Mingo, and Yamasee, and many more ancient tribes before. All of us who are not Indigenous to this region are living on stolen land and we must work to repair relationships and share the full history of this land.

2 Any effort toward a truly just transition in Central Appalachia must address and dismantle white supremacy, systemic racism, and the harms of a capitalism that relies on oppression and exploitation to increase its wealth. It must also center the livelihoods of Black, Brown, and working poor people while repairing the harm ignited when this land was stolen from Indigenous people to extract, hoard, and pillage its abundant resources.

3 A just transition in Central Appalachia must be led by those of us who live here every day and who are most directly impacted by the issues we seek to address. The work towards a just transition must build the leadership of Black, Brown, Indigenous, young, and Queer people in our region who have been invisibilized and silenced for too long.

4 A just transition in Central Appalachia must create true transformation and avoid repeating the harms that the fossil fuel industry, extraction, and exploitation have caused. It must prioritize people and communal care over profit. It must focus on divesting from values of domination and invest in community solidarity economy practices and values such as cooperation and shared power, democratic participation, shared commons (land, housing, and healthcare), and honoring many paths to reach collective liberation.

5 A just transition in Central Appalachia must center collective care for the land and all living beings. For too long, land and survival in our region were intrinsically and often forcibly tied to outside forces who prioritized profiting from these mountains over community care — destroying livelihoods, community health and holistic wealth, and opportunities to live in better relationships with the abundant ecosystem of our region and each other. Decolonizing our collective relationship to land and working toward a regenerative ecological economy provides long term, care-centered opportunities for restructuring our livelihoods, economic practices and values, and communities.



Overview and Introduction

This report was authored by Dialogue + Design Associates and summarizes content from online interviews conducted with 18 individuals with unique backgrounds and perspectives identified by the Highlander Research and Education Center (Highlander) working on just transition initiatives across Central Appalachia in the spring and summer of 2020, as well as conversations with Highlander team members. First, we want to express our gratitude to the interviewees – your thoughtful ideas, comments, thinking, and stories were inspiring, varied, honest, uplifting, challenging, and extremely rich. A big thanks to all of you!

Ivy Brashear

Mountain Association (formerly Mountain Association for Community Economic Development)

Gabrielle Chapman

Humane Society of the United States

Mekyah Davis

Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project and Black Appalachian Young and Rising

Eric Dixon

Board Member, Highlander Research and Education

Anthony Flaccavento

Sequestering Carbon, Accelerating Local Economies Inc.

Rae Garringer

Country Queers

Andrea Golden

Cenzontle Language Justice Cooperative, Dulce Lomita Mobile Home Cooperative, and PODER Emma Community Ownership

Ethan Hamblin

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation

William Isom

Black in Appalachia

Lou Murrey

Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project

Mimi Pickering

Appalshop

Raynalle Rouse

Theatre teacher and formerly with Call to Action for Racial Equality (CARE)-West Virginia

Carl Shoupe

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

Ada Smith

Appalshop

Bonnie Swinford

Sierra Club

Lyndsay Tarus

Alliance for Appalachia

Tanya Turner

Chorus Foundation

Stephanie Tyree

West Virginia Community Development Hub

This report is a strategic assessment developed for and in partnership with Highlander by Christine Gyovai and Sierra Gladfelter, who offer their gratitude to Highlander project manager Elizabeth Wright. Please note that this report is a collective summary of interviews, and is reflective of what the authors synthesized from interviewees but has not been filtered through a Highlander lens.

A longer narrative report was drafted by Dialogue + Design for Highlander's internal strategy development and to inform their work in Central Appalachia moving forward. If you are interested in accessing that narrative report, learning more about this work, or sharing your own learnings from engaging with this material, please email Elizabeth Wright at elizabeth@highlandercenter.org.

This report will also inform Highlander's programming moving forward to meet identified needs and boost capacity and support for these efforts. The report includes case studies and sections focusing on: A Vision for Transformation; How to Do the Work; Opportunities: What to Build On; Challenges: What is Holding us Back; Beacons of Hope with Models from the Region and Beyond; and Appendices including a list of interviewees, interview questions, and other organizations, publications, and resources.

For more information about the Highlander Research and Education Center, or view this report online, see the website: www.highlandercenter.org.

A note from the report authors on context and framing just transition: When we began the interview process, we used the term "just transition" for all of the interview questions and project framing. As we moved through the interviews and reflected on the bigger picture, it became clear that community leaders are calling for a need to move beyond a "just transition" to something bigger, bolder, stronger, more innovative and with greater capacity for systemic change. While we refer to just transition in places throughout the text, we are also signifying the need to move beyond transition to transformation.





A true transformation, not just a transition, is needed for Central Appalachia and its people.

A Vision for Transformation

“We are seeking transformation and not just transition.” —IVY BRASHEAR

Community leaders are calling for the need to move beyond a “just transition” by seeking a fuller transformation through work that is tied more deeply to the visions, needs, and interests of diverse communities who are of and from the Central Appalachian region. This requires a commitment to systematic change and an approach to organizing and working with communities that recognizes the fact that achieving a just transition is a process and not a destination. Moreover, because a just transition has meant and continues to mean different things to different people, it is important that any work that seeks to build a just transition in Central Appalachia—or transformation for that matter—is driven by the visions of frontline communities and is guided by a diverse group of leaders, including Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), directly impacted communities, intergenerational organizers, and the working poor.

“A just transition is giving people that have had the least, the most.”

—GABRIELLE CHAPMAN

For a true transformation to take place in Appalachia, there are several key elements that must be achieved: people must have what they need to be healthy, happy, and fulfilled in their daily lives; the movement must be led by BIPOC leaders and communities who have been directly impacted; and people should be sustained by work that is meaningful and provides for their families. At a larger scale, a just transition builds community resilience and self-determination; creates communities that are inclusive, welcoming, and safe for all who live there; and provides a healing process for people and places impacted by extraction and injustice. This vision may be bold, but it is also essential if we are to be true to the “just” in our region’s just transition. The key elements of this vision are below, followed by the section “How to Do the Work.” Direct quotes from interviewees as well as case studies highlighting the vision and strategies are included throughout the text of the report.

1 People have what they need to lead healthy, happy, and fulfilled lives.

2 The movement is led by a diverse group of leaders and those communities who have been most impacted.

3 Cooperation and collaboration need to lead.

4 A just transition builds community resilience and self-determination.

5 Communities are inclusive, welcoming, and safe for all who live there.

6 A just transition provides a healing process for communities from past extraction and injustice.

7 The movement leads to a transformation, not just a transition.

A Vision for Transformation



How to Do the Work

Building on the principles above in "A Vision for Transformation," the strategies and approaches offered here come from veteran organizers, community leaders, and people who have been working on the ground, in communities, for decades toward a just transition. While certainly not exhaustive, their list of lessons learned and shared commitments to how to do the work, provide a pathway forward for creating systemic change, transformation, and justice to move beyond transition in Central Appalachia.

"We are all who we've been waiting for. We just have to step into the work together."

—STEPHANIE TYREE

1

Center the voices of those who have been left out of the movement.

2

Give people a say over their own lives.

"We can't achieve a just transition if people don't do it themselves."

—ERIC DIXON

Black in Appalachia Podcast



www.blackinappalachia.org/podcast

Having long called this region home, Black Appalachians have remained mostly invisible, while the dominant narratives of Appalachia present an overwhelming, white cultural homogeneity. The Black in Appalachia Podcast challenges these misconceptions and builds a more honest depiction of Appalachia by highlighting how Black families have shaped and have been shaped by the region for centuries.¹



Follow the lead of Black, Indigenous, Women, and People of Color.

"We all need to be listening to Women of Color."

—BONNIE SWINFORD

Knoxville City Council Movement



Knoxville City Council Movement (CCM) holds city council members accountable and elects progressive candidates to city council through participatory democratic practices, community organizing and education. Through people's movement assemblies and civic

engagement, CCM brings community members together to identify and advocate for local budget priorities and shape policy platforms that reflect community needs, incorporating collective input into city council campaigns and public agendas, supporting grassroots candidates' election to city council seats. CCM organizing has led to Knoxville's first openly socialist woman of color elected to city council in 2017, Seema Singh, and another of their three candidates was elected in 2019, Amelia Parker, bringing CCM representation to 20% of the local governing body. Between campaign seasons, CCM members continue to organize community oversight and attendance at local government meetings and in direct action events. More information on the CCM is also available online.^{2,3}

“This is an opportunity for us to look honestly at what communities need in the Mountain South.”

—WILLIAM ISOM

4

Invest in communities so they can lead their own local transformations.

“We need more programs that are willing to invest in people over a decade of their lives so that we can transform ourselves and transform the places that we live. People need long-term investments just like places need long-term investments.”

—ANDREA GOLDEN

5

Address the legacy of extraction, exploitation, and white supremacy.

6

Continue to connect issues across communities to move the region forward.

“The more time we spend with each other, deeply listening, the more we’re going to succeed in building solutions for what a new just world looks like.”

—BONNIE SWINFORD



Black Soil: Our Better Nature

www.blacksoilky.com

The mission of Black Soil: Our Better Nature is to reconnect Black Kentuckians to their legacy and heritage in agriculture. By bringing together urban families with rural and urban-based Black farmers, growers, and producers across the state, they help introduce opportunities in agriculture that promote self-sufficiency, encourage healthy living, and activate cooperative economics. Their vision is to help foster a greater market share for Black farmers and producers as they provide healthy food options to a larger consumer base. The interviewee who mentioned this project noted that Black Soil is working to address the legacy of the United States Department of Agriculture’s disenfranchisement of Black farmers whose land was taken from them in Kentucky, and has raised important questions about who can claim an Appalachian identity and place in the just transition movement.

7

Dismantle systems of structural racism.

“Part of our regional transition must be a transition to equity, dismantling the institutionalized racism that deprives Black and Brown Appalachians of full participation in the public process, equitable access to education and services, fair treatment by the criminal justice system, and the opportunity to be the builders of a new Appalachian economy.”
—GABRIELLE CHAPMAN



8

Make connections across intersecting oppressions.

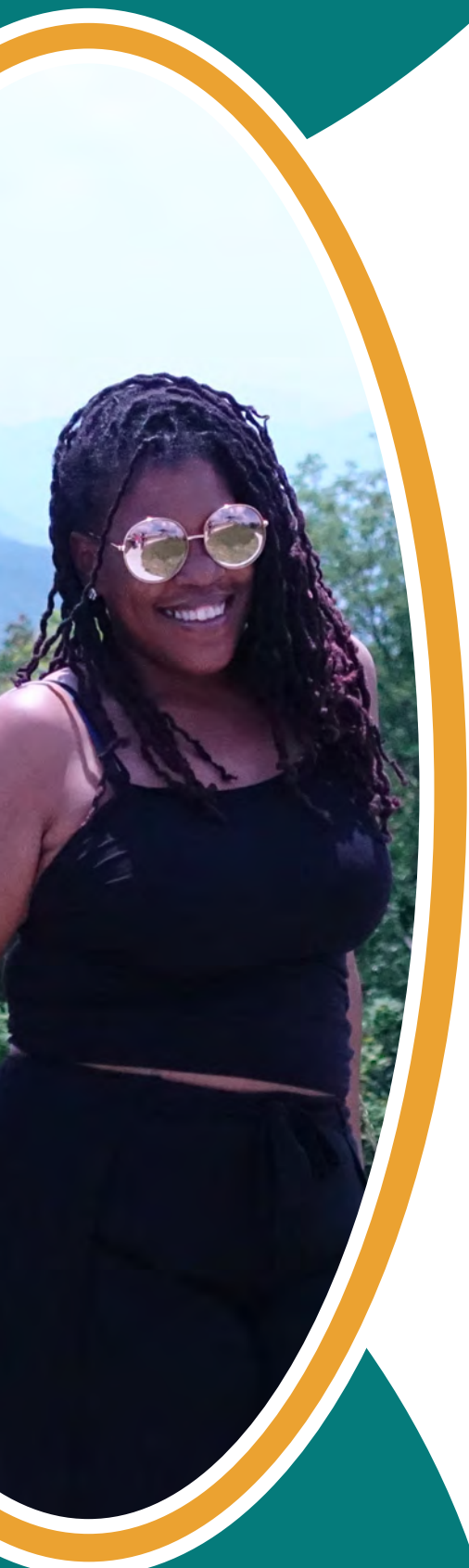
Knoxville Black Mama's BailOut

www.southernersonnewground.org/our-work/freefromfear/black-mamas-bail-out-action



Brandi Augustus (left) and Charice Starr (right), members of Knoxville's Black Mama's BailOut and Highlander Center staff members.

Knoxville Black Mama's BailOut is an action project of the local chapter of Southerners on New Ground (SONG), a radical political home for Queer Southerners. Knoxville's BailOut action is one of many across the country, coordinated by the National BailOut Collective, a formation of over a dozen community based organizations, including SONG. Knoxville's Black Mama's BailOut reimagines public safety in its work to abolish prisons and cages by reallocating funds for community and working to defund police. Creative community fundraising efforts provide cash bail for organizers to release Black women detained on poverty charges that reflect systemic oppression and racism. Organizers provide hands-on follow-up support to women after their release and support community education and direct actions to uproot policing and incarceration systems that put Black people and families in harm's way. ⁴



9

Start small but stay in it for the long haul.

“Do something small that is within your realm of possibility because it will awaken hope and uncover new possibilities. Then take the next step.”

—ANDREA GOLDEN

10

Be willing to try things and adapt: there is no single solution.

11

Consistently engage new people.

12

Leverage multiracial, cultural, and intergenerational organizing.

“Organizing is what transforms our relationship with ourselves and each other. If we have shared problems, there has to be a shared solution.”

—ANDREA GOLDEN

13

Commit to critical self-reflection and structural change from within.

“We are in this to transform, we’re not in this to be perfect.”

—COMMUNITY LEADER

14

Support youth in creating and advancing their vision of a just transition.

“If people are committed to lifting up youth leadership or Black leadership, then they need to step aside and start learning how to hand over power to be able to get fresh perspectives, fresh ideas.”

—MEKYAH DAVIS

15

Step aside and hand over power.

“It is really important that we hear from younger people about what the conditions and the realities are that we need to have in our communities to make it a place that they want to stay and come back to.”

—MIMI PICKERING



Black Appalachian Young and Rising

www.thestayproject.net/what-is-black-appalachian-young--rising.html

Black Appalachian Young and Rising is a collective of young Black people throughout the Appalachian region who are working to build a shared collective Black Appalachian identity and community and doing the work of nourishing Black youth leadership in the region. This initiative was born out of organizing by Black Appalachian youth working to identify and build leadership positions and opportunities for young, Black people in Appalachia. The steering committee for the inaugural gathering of Black Appalachian Young and Rising in November 2019 included A-Nya Badger, Nina Morgan, Sydney Underwood, who served as coordinator for the gathering, Ge’onoah Davis, Trey Lomax, and Mekyah Davis. At this event, participants explored what it means to be Black, young, and Appalachian and what change is required for them to truly thrive in their communities and realize the futures they dream of. Since its first event, Black Appalachian Young and Rising has grown into a powerful network and platform for youth organizing across the region and has found a home as a program of Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) after the STAY Project lent resources and support toward the gathering in a commitment to deepen their own work in supporting and flanking Black youth leadership. Mekyah Davis joined STAY as Co-Coordinator in August 2020 and continues to steward the program and this work.

16

Build relationships, networks, and deep partnerships across the region.

“There is power in coalition building. Growth can happen really rapidly when you get together with other folks and learn from what they’re doing in their communities.”

—**BONNIE SWINFORD**



Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center and Alliance for Appalachia

<https://appalachianlawcenter.org>
www.theallianceforappalachia.org

The Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center (ACLC) is a nonprofit law firm that fights for justice in the coalfields by representing coal miners and their families on issues of black lung and mine safety and by working with grassroots groups and individuals to protect the land and people from misuse and degradation caused by extractive industries. The mission of The Alliance for Appalachia is: “The Alliance for Appalachia promotes a healthy, just Appalachia by supporting our member organizations in communities impacted by destructive resource extraction.”⁵ Several interviewees elevated ACLC’s effective grassroots organizing work with The Alliance for Appalachia and its member organizations to bring the Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More (RECLAIM) Act into being. Both ACLC and The Alliance for Appalachia had Appalachian Transition Fellows who collaborated on a year-long project to write a white paper about the Abandoned Mine Land Fund in Appalachia. They conducted research, developed a preliminary paper, received iterative input from communities, and developed a policy platform for the Abandoned Mine Land Fund and the need for it to invest in cleaning up the legacy impacts of mining. This eventually became the RECLAIM Act, with ACLC and The Alliance for Appalachia’s collaborative work feeding directly into federal policy. The effort also involved creating several publications and toolkits including, “Revitalizing Appalachia: A Toolkit for cleanup and community development.” In this way, the RECLAIM Act was built from the ground up with a couple of groups organizing around abandoned mine lands and funding for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund. Now there is a whole network of more than 50 groups in the national working group. While some groups offer critique that the RECLAIM Act was taken from the grassroots, it remains one of the most successful examples of a genuine grassroots process being integrated into policy in a meaningful way. This occurred by building out a piece of legislation that was rooted in what communities wanted, which many communities also passed resolutions of support around.⁶

17

Restore people, communities, and places through practices of care, with ecological restoration at the forefront.

18

Grow models of effective community ownership and control of local resources through cooperatives and collectives.

"A just world is one where all people are treated with dignity and respect, have their basic human needs met, and have the freedom and self-determination to make choices for themselves without fear of persecution, discrimination or violence."

—BONNIE SWINFORD

PODER Emma Community Ownership

"Our vision is around building community capacity and community assets and creating a culture of stewardship through community ownership rather than that of the individual." —**ANDREA GOLDEN**

www.poderemma.org

PODER Emma Community Ownership, based in the Emma neighborhood of Asheville, North Carolina, provides technical assistance, accompaniment,⁷ and lending for the development and sustainability of worker owned businesses, resident owned mobile home parks, and community based real estate investment cooperatives. Their lending is done as a member of Seed Commons, a national community wealth cooperative, and their loan fund has invested over \$1.5 million in community owned cooperative assets in our neighborhood. PODER Emma stewards three Cooperative Networks with seven cooperative members. These networks provide space for peer learning, shared resources and leveraging of economic collective power. The Dulce Lomita Mobile Home Park Cooperative, which is a cooperative member, has been working to start the first resident-owned mobile home park cooperative in the region. With support from Seed Commons, the Dulce Lomita Mobile Home Cooperative was created as an opportunity for tenants of two mobile home parks to collectively purchase and learn how to manage the parks together. So far, they have worked with two mobile home parks and one scattered site model. In June 2020, they purchased another 13-unit and a 24-unit mobile home park.

Additional Key Ideas

These additional interviewee ideas are not in order of the frequency with which interviewees shared them.

- ▶ Be accountable to frontline communities.
- ▶ Employ a systems change approach that confronts capitalism.
- ▶ Work toward tangible solutions that resonate with the needs of local people.
- ▶ Do not build systems now that will need to be torn down and dismantled later.
- ▶ Reallocate resources to build greater equity and justice.
- ▶ Build power through popular education and participatory action research.
- ▶ Votes count: organize people to vote and fill positions of power in local elections.
- ▶ Create safe spaces where people can grow, learn, and have conversations.
- ▶ Leverage people's creativity and rich cultural traditions.
- ▶ Organize with both workers and local communities together.
- ▶ Hold politicians and companies accountable.
- ▶ Invest in industries that cannot be outsourced or taken away from communities.
- ▶ Funders need to be flexible and responsive to communities' emergent needs.
- ▶ Support ecological sustainability by recognizing rural-urban interdependence.
- ▶ Ecological restoration needs to be at the heart of community restoration.
- ▶ Confront your own privileges and blinders, regardless of who you are.
- ▶ Remember that there are different roles and contributions in the movement.
- ▶ Protect grassroots movements from co-option by politicians and other groups.
- ▶ Once a project or program has served its purpose, let it go or allow it to change.
- ▶ Believe in the value of yourself and your community despite what the larger narrative about them may be.
- ▶ Persevere.



Opportunities: What to Build On

Central Appalachia has many, rich opportunities to build from —many more than we often realize in our day-to-day work. Several of these opportunities are rooted in the strongest and most resilient qualities of who people of the region are and how they live in community with one another. When brought together more intentionally with the approaches shared above under "How to Do the Work," these opportunities may help us transform Central Appalachia and achieve a truly just transition in our region. Interviewees also emphasized how both COVID and its impacts on communities, as well as the important uprisings for racial justice across the United States, provide a critical opportunity for us to reexamine just transition work broadly and explore its necessary intersections with other movements for justice and liberation.

“With opportunity there is great responsibility. There are opportunities that could be created and actualized, but it won’t be a just transition unless the most vulnerable are protected and included in those decisions”

***–GABRIELLE
CHAPMAN***

1 Young people are organizing and leading movements in powerful ways.

"Young people are just getting out there and doing it. They aren't paying attention to people telling them they can't do it; they're just doing it"

—IVY BRASHEAR

2 COVID has laid bare many underlying injustices, leading to an awakening.

3 White-dominated communities and institutions can no longer ignore structural racism and white supremacy.

"A just transition has to be anti-racist. Period."

—GABRIELLE CHAPMAN

"The global pandemic has put the spotlight on the importance of essential workers and has created a greater awareness around class divisions and broken structures in our healthcare system and economy. The capitalist structure has been cracked wide open."

—BONNIE SWINFORD

Country Queers

www.countryqueers.com

Country Queers is an ongoing multimedia oral history project documenting the diverse experiences of rural, small town, and country LGBTQIA+ folks in the US – across intersecting layers of identity such as race, class, age, ability, gender identity, and religion. The project "aims to preserve rural Queer histories through documenting our contemporary presence and historical existence; complicate ideas about who and what make up rural spaces and resist the narrative that rural communities are monolithic; push back against the narrative that Queer people can only thrive in major metropolitan spaces; and connect country Queers to one another across geographical distance in an attempt to help fight the isolation we often experience, and to build rural Queer community." Country Queers was created in 2013 when the founder, Rae Garringer, started wondering why it was so hard to find Queer stories in the region. The first interviews for the project were conducted during the Stay Together Appalachian Youth Summer Institute that Highlander hosted in 2013. In the years since, more than 65 people from 15 states have been interviewed as part of the initiative and the Country Queers oral history project recently launched a podcast in 2020.



4

There is more support for progressive policies than ever before.

"We need tools to heal from trauma and to rewire our relationship to power and wealth, or else we will end up just replicating the systems that we've been affected by because that is all we know."

—TANYA TURNER

5

The transition is already happening.

"With the collapse of the fossil fuel industry, we have an opportunity to move to something better."

—MIMI PICKERING

6

People in the region are resilient and know how to care for each other.

"No one is going to come in here to take care of us in the way that we can take care of each other."

—IVY BRASHEAR

Holler Health Justice

www.hollerhealthjustice.org

Holler Health Justice (HHJ) is doing groundbreaking work in the area of reproductive justice. HHJ was founded by a group of young reproductive health, rights, and justice activists looking to meet the substantial need of funding and practical support for West Virginians seeking abortion care. With guidance from the National Network of Abortion Funds and Kentucky Health Justice Network, HHJ launched in August 2018 to become the first and only financial and practical abortion support fund in West Virginia. Led by a majority BIPOC, Queer, and low-income board of directors, HHJ believes that those directly impacted by an issue are best positioned to design and lead solutions.

Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project

www.thestayproject.net

The Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) project is a network of young people between the ages of 14-30 who are supporting each other to be in Appalachia and to make their home towns places in which they can and want to stay. It is an organization that is led by Queer youth and Youth of Color. Until STAY was created, there was a critical infrastructure gap in the region for supporting youth-led organizing, and many young activists did not have a movement home in the region. Several interviewees highlighted how when COVID first happened, STAY was one of the first groups to respond by starting a mutual aid fund to support Berea College students who were at risk of becoming homeless, jobless, without internet and technology, and without access to healthcare. "When the crisis hit, it was very clear who could act quickly and who couldn't," one interviewee commented. "STAY was just immediately able to respond, and they still are."



People have a deep love for the land and a strong commitment to place.

*"I just love these mountains.
And I'm going to fight until I die."*

—CARL SHOUBE



Central Appalachia has a long and rich history of successful organizing.

"Our vision is around building community capacity and community assets and creating a culture of stewardship through community ownership rather than that of the individual."

—ANDREA GOLDEN

Appalachian Media Institute

www.amiappalshop.org

Since 1988, the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), a project housed at Appalshop, has prepared generations of young people to work in their communities and to confront persistent problems. AMI's excellent leadership development programs bring young people together to learn film and video making and to work as teams on projects focused on the region. "It's really helped young people to look at the place that they are from in different ways," Mimi Pickering shared. "Many of them come in with pretty negative feelings about where they are from with a desire to escape." Over the three decades it has been active, AMI has intensively trained more than 1,200 young people and supported the production of over 200 youth-made media pieces, ranging from profiles of Appalachian artisans, to regional identity, to studies of the economic, environmental and societal impacts of coal mining.

Through the process of learning to tell stories, many young people have gone on to college and have given back to their communities. [All Access EKY⁸](#) is another youth-led project that grew out of AMI that is telling stories about access to reproductive health care in the region, including barriers and obstacles that exist and ways to work more effectively with providers.



9

Communities are listening to each other and telling stories together.

10

Funders have begun to restructure how they invest in communities.

11

There are new opportunities for online organizing and popular education, as well as messaging around just transition.

Chorus Foundation

www.chorusfoundation.org

The Chorus Foundation works for a just transition to a regenerative economy in the United States and supports communities on the front lines of the old, extractive economy to build new bases of political, economic, and cultural power for systemic change. The Chorus Foundation, which is sunsetting in the next five years and practices participatory philanthropy in Eastern Kentucky, provides an important model that other funders could follow. They have committed a million dollars a year to Eastern Kentucky over the course of 10 years, and are currently half way into this timeline for giving. In 2019, Chorus Foundation grantees had a meeting to decide how to distribute and invest \$1 million in the region. While this model is still a work in progress, participatory philanthropy lets people on the ground decide what to fund. It also allows communities to practice self governance, manage and direct capital, and if implemented inclusively may have the potential to be an effective and just way to redistribute wealth.

Southern Connected Communities Project

www.southernconnectedcommunities.org

The Southern Connected Communities Project (SCCP) aims to build an interconnected series of community controlled broadband infrastructures to deliver coverage initially to communities throughout east Tennessee and Central Appalachia with the ultimate aim of creating a replicable model for community-controlled broadband projects. This is an initiative that came out of the Community Economic Development Network of East Tennessee (CEDnet)'s effort to map east Tennessee communities' geographies and needs. After a year of visioning exercises with communities, better access to reliable and affordable rural broadband internet was identified as a shared need and priority. With this, CEDnet started a Rural Broadband Campaign focused on policy. Based on policy wins, they started working with local utilities to expand broadband services to rural communities and started researching other models of communities building their own locally-owned community broadband. Through a demonstration project at the Highlander Research and Education Center, in which a broadband tower was installed and local homes were connected, CEDnet rolled out the Southern Connected Communities Project in the Clearfork Valley which continues to demonstrate what a rural model of community owned broadband could be. They are now working on a pilot at the Clearfork Community Institute.



More Opportunities for Action


1 Analyze and share the story of Central Appalachia's racial wealth gap. While the racial wealth gap has been analyzed nationally and regionally for the South, there has not been the same systematic analysis for Central Appalachia. Synthesizing data and creating localized reports on the racial wealth gap at the state and county level would be a powerful way to tell the story of how wealth has been systematically extracted from the region over the past 100 years. It also may be worth investigating and documenting where that wealth was transferred to and where it is currently being held.

2 Study bankruptcy reform and its possible application to the coal industry. With robust national-level conversations taking place on bankruptcy reform broadly, it may be valuable to explore possibilities for this within the coal industry specifically.

3 Invest in research on the economic value of Central Appalachia's forests and land. Central Appalachia's forests and land have the potential to play a major role in the region's new economy and should receive more research, investment, and attention. Particular attention should be given to non-timber forest products that are tied to local people's identity and culture.

4 Explore the cannabis industry as a potential economic opportunity that can capitalize on Central Appalachia's geography and climate and also include reparative structures. While a sensitive topic for some, one interviewee noted cannabis as a potential economic opportunity for the region, particularly if its legalization and expansion is done in a way that builds reparative structures into it that account for those communities previously criminalized by it in uneven ways. For example, legislation may ensure that a certain percentage of invested dollars goes to support Black dispensaries and farms in accessing licenses, which is often an economic barrier to their participation in the industry.

5 Connect community organizers and local nonprofits to leadership development opportunities. Many community leaders and local nonprofits in Central Appalachia, particularly those in rural communities, may not be aware of leadership development opportunities at the regional and national level. Organizations directly tied to national groups and regional coalitions need to actively connect community leaders and nonprofits to opportunities.



6 Engage local Peoples Movement Assemblies. Local Peoples Movement Assemblies deserve more thought and support as a way to build trust between people who may not share the same politics but who share similar local grievances and can begin to have conversations across political divides.

7 Encourage and support nonprofit organizations' efforts to unionize. Organizations engaged in just transition work have an opportunity to lead with values that are representative of the communities that they are trying to build by unionizing and supporting their employees with fair wages and benefits.

8 Support Black leaders and organizers with resources and community support. Black community leaders and organizers in the region need support from anchor institutions like the Highlander Center and other institutions that are actively working on racial justice and centering this in just transition work. As many institutions and communities across the nation are finally awakening to the reality of structural racism in the US, there are many requests being made of Black leaders and organizers to educate and answer questions of white allies or offer their visions for the future. These leaders need to be fairly compensated for any requests being made of them and also supported by their allies.

9 Develop a collective Appalachian Just Transition or Beyond Transition resource guide. There is a need for a collective Appalachian Beyond Transition Resource Guide that is informed by a critical, race theory lens and that gives direction to other organizations and nonprofits working on advocacy. It could look at different issues, from criminal justice to public education and unravel what a solidarity economy would look like within those contexts.



Challenges: What's Holding Us Back

“As long as we’re not prepared or able to work on racial justice, we’re not going to be able to build a future that is actually just.”

—STEPHANIE TYREE

Despite numerous opportunities, there are many challenges that hold the region back ranging from significant structural barriers such as racial injustice and lack of access to key infrastructure, to community members struggling even more today than in decades past to make ends meet and to feel safe in their own communities. Addressing these challenges will require working closely with communities towards solutions at both the macro and micro scales for lasting, systemic change to be realized.

1

Racial justice has not been centered in the just transition movement.

“There is no ‘just transition’ if it is centering whiteness and white folks in the process, because for far too long that’s what it’s looked like: meeting their needs, and oftentimes not even meeting their needs.”

—MEKYAH DAVIS

2

Central Appalachia has been extracted from for centuries, leading to the consolidation of wealth and power.

“Now the coal’s gone and they’ve forgotten about us.”

—CARL SHOUBE

3

The region continues to economically depend on extractive industries.

4

Many people and communities can barely make ends meet.

5

COVID has further exacerbated the region’s existing, layered crises.

“We already had multi-layered challenges and now COVID is like a Rubik’s cube of new challenges. We aren’t going to bounce back in the way that other places can.”

—STEPHANIE TYREE





6

There is a chronic lack of resources to support just transition work.

"It's actually hundreds of millions of dollars that need to be invested to have a real robust transition."

—STEPHANIE TYREE

7

Just transition has been too narrowly defined and imagined in the region.

"Too often we have a monolithic view of Appalachia and what it is and who it is. If we're talking about just transition, but we're not encompassing everybody's experience and views that they bring to the table from their lives, then we can't truly have a just transition."

—MEKYAH DAVIS

8

There is an intergenerational gap in approach and vision to just transition, and a need to actively value and engage both elders and youth.

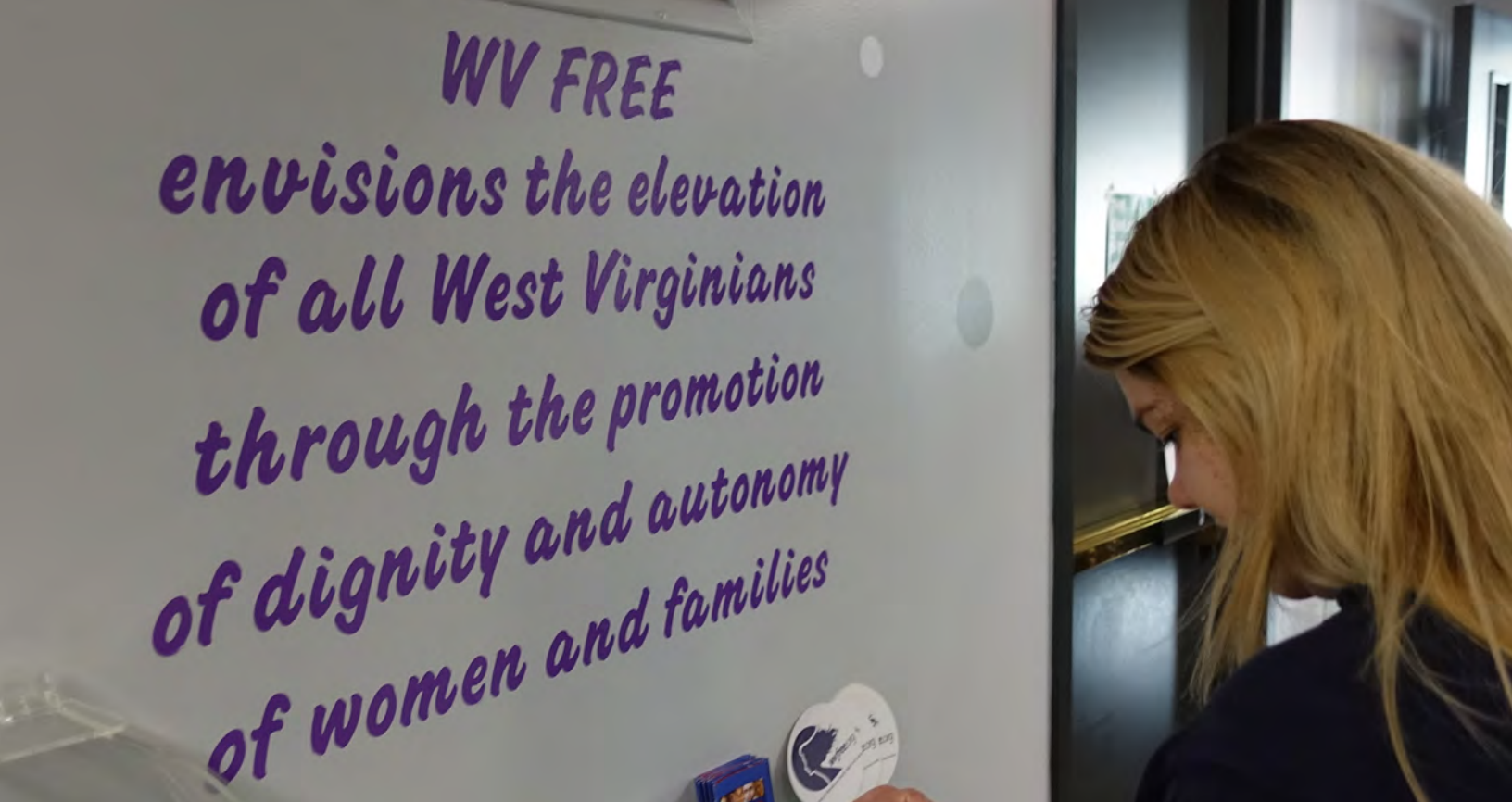
9

Politicians and groups sometimes co-opt regional economic development initiatives and grassroots movements for their own political agendas.

Other Important Challenges

These additional interviewee ideas are not in order of the frequency with which interviewees shared them.

- ▶ Not all transitions are just.
- ▶ A just transition cannot be achieved in the current economic and political system.
- ▶ It is always a struggle to build meaningful policy in a way that is rooted and grounded in true grassroots organizing.
- ▶ Young people often leave the region for education and economic opportunity.
- ▶ People with greater access to professional and educational opportunities come to the region to lead its organizations, “solve” its issues, and extract local stories.
- ▶ Black communities and People of Color often do not feel safe in their communities.
- ▶ The just transition movement, and nonprofits in general, continue to rely on the labor of underpaid, overworked individuals.
- ▶ Regional efforts to unionize nonprofit organizations have been challenging.
- ▶ It is difficult to find alignment on issues given the region’s racial, political, and geographic diversity.
- ▶ People who have worked in the coal industry for generations often do not feel recognized or respected for their sacrifices and contributions to the country.
- ▶ The region suffers from unfair stereotypes around poverty and substance abuse.
- ▶ Just transition work takes decades to achieve and many organizations are not willing to make that long-term commitment.
- ▶ Many communities have lost their social and cultural community spaces, and those that are still left such as churches are mostly maintained by retired people.
- ▶ Basic infrastructure like roads and access to the internet is an issue in the region.
- ▶ The growing political divide creates distrust among people and impacts broad community organizing in many rural communities.
- ▶ Coal companies continue to own and control much of the land.
- ▶ It is difficult to convince people that they have power through their vote.
- ▶ The loss of unions has led to the rise of greater wealth inequality and injustice.
- ▶ Given peoples’ economic dependence on coal, any policies that put pressure on the industry are difficult to advance politically because people have jobs at stake.
- ▶ Many workforce training programs place the burden on people who are actually highly trained to learn new skills in order to be “employable.”



Beacons of Hope: Models and Case Studies from the Region

The model organizations and initiatives listed below were recommended by interviewees as some of the most effective institutions and community efforts working to bring about a just transformation of Central Appalachia's economy and communities. Those that were mentioned by the greatest number of individuals appear first, followed by those with qualitative information offered by interviewees. A complete list of organizations and initiatives recommended by interviewees is also included in Appendix B. Please note that the models and case studies highlighted in the body of the report above are not repeated in this section. These include the Black in Appalachia podcast, Knoxville City Council Movement, Black Soil: Our Better Nature, Knoxville Black Mama's BailOut, Black Appalachian Young and Rising, the work of the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and the Alliance for Appalachia on the RECLAIM Act, PODER Emma Community Ownership, Holler Health Justice, the Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project, Country Queers, Appalachian Media Institute, the Chorus Foundation's participatory philanthropy work in Eastern Kentucky, and the Southern Connected Communities Project in the Clearfork Valley of Tennessee.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

www.kftc.org

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) is a grassroots organization that works through local chapters and at-large members in counties across the state of Kentucky. They use a set of core strategies, from leadership development to communications and voter empowerment, to impact a broad range of issues, including coal and water, new energy and transition, economic justice and voting rights. Several interviewees highlighted KFTC's strong values, effective model of organizing through local elections, and its successful work on a number of state and federal policies. KFTC was cited as one of the organizations in the region that has done groundbreaking thinking and grassroots organizing around a just transition in the region, particularly during the beginning stages of the Shaping our Appalachian Region (SOAR) initiative and continuing through their just transition work today as a member of the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA).

Coalfield Development

www.coalfield-development.org

Coalfield Development is a not-for-profit organization headquartered in Wayne, West Virginia that works to create new social enterprises in sectors of the economy that model a more socially, environmental, and financially sustainable economy than what the coal industry has provided. Some highlights include the organization's partnership with Solar Holler, LLC to found the first solar installation company in southern West Virginia as well as the organization's innovations in the sustainable agriculture field through the founding of Refresh Appalachia. Overall, Coalfield has helped start 52 new businesses over the past decade leading to more than 250 new full-time jobs for the region. Interviewees highlighted Coalfield Development as a world class model of just transition work, elevating for example, its 33-6-3 Workforce Development Model,⁹ which offers displaced workers a 2.5 year contract consisting of 33 hours per week of paid work, six credit hours of higher education and three hours of personal development mentorship.



West Virginia Community Development Hub

www.wvhub.org

The West Virginia Community Development Hub (The Hub) was developed as a result of research into why, despite substantial investments and development efforts, West Virginia's communities continue to struggle, and why the state continues to rank near the bottom in so many quality of life measurements. The conclusion was that lack of improvement was due to a lack of consistency, alignment, and a lack of capacity at the community level to take advantage of resources and services. Today, The Hub works to build deep relationships with communities through policy and leadership development work across West Virginia.

The Hub never brings a plan into a community and says, "this is what you should do." Instead, it helps them figure out what they want to do and then it supports them in doing the work. This approach is inspired by the theory of accompaniment, which is the idea that you are an accompanist to the communities that you work with and the communities set the direction for the work. The Hub simply provides resources and support and is there for as long as it is wanted and needed by the community. This approach requires a long term commitment to the work. It's about leading from behind and beside and not leading from the front by bringing in resources, new ideas, and strategies. One specific example is The Hub's work with the town of Matewan in Mingo County, West Virginia. Since 2014, The Hub has supported 50 different projects in this community. Part of their success is that despite being a town of 500 people, they refuse to believe that they are too small and continue to do the work of much larger towns. They also constantly engage new people. In this way, Matewan has been able to move from small projects to big dreams.

Mountain Association

www.mtassociation.org

The Mountain Association, formerly the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED), invests in people and places in Eastern Kentucky to advance a just transition to a new economy that is more diverse, sustainable, equitable and resilient. In 2020, the organization changed its name to underscore its commitment to a new beginning that is more inclusive and welcoming to the people and communities it serves. Interviewees highlighted its diverse programming and four decades of investment in Kentucky.

Appalshop

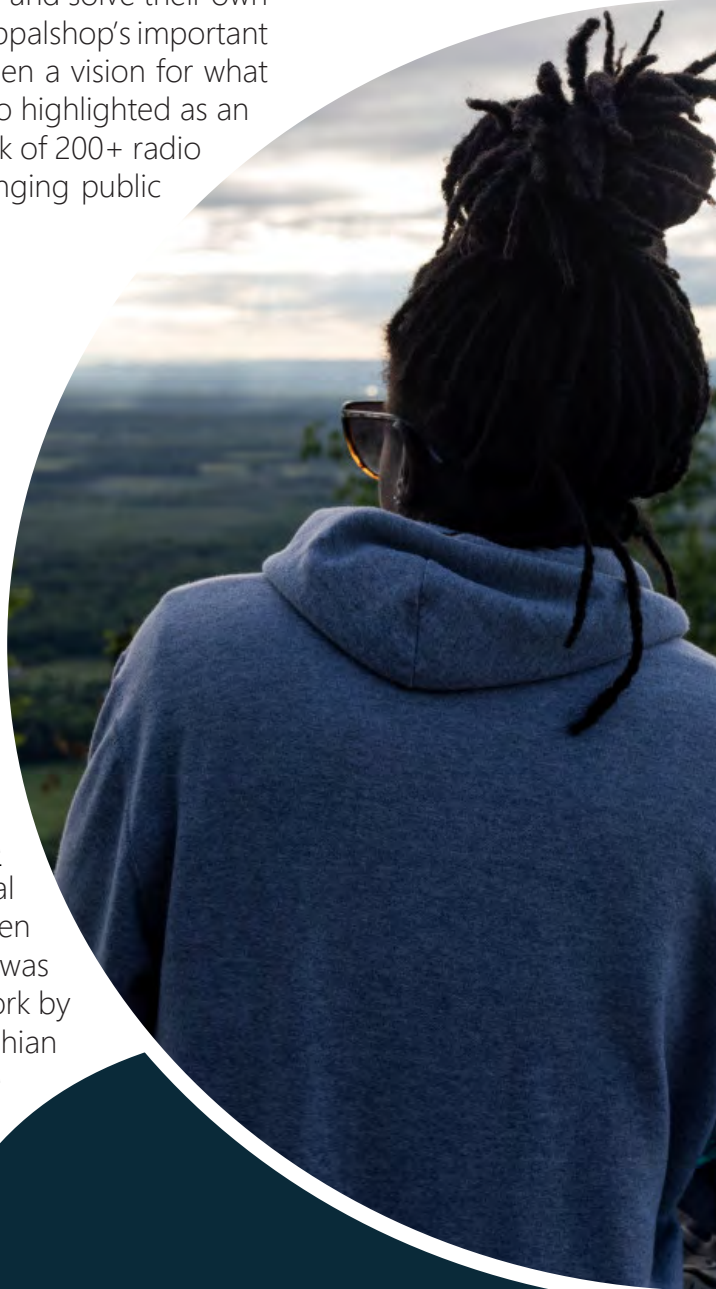
www.appalshop.org

Appalshop is a media, arts, and education center located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachia. Its goals are to document, disseminate, and revitalize the lasting traditions and contemporary creativity of Appalachia and to tell stories that support communities' efforts to achieve justice and equity and solve their own problems in their own ways. Several interviewees highlighted Appalshop's important work in the cultural sphere to change stereotypes and broaden a vision for what is possible for the region. Making Connections News¹⁰ was also highlighted as an effective Appalshop program that includes an online StoryBank of 200+ radio stories on individuals and communities with the goal of changing public perceptions of what is possible for the future of the region.

Highlander Research and Education Center

www.highlandercenter.org

Multiple interviewees highlighted Highlander Research and Education Center's Mapping Our Futures: Economics & Governance curriculum¹¹ as an essential resource to communities and organizations organizing around just transition and working toward a transformation of Central Appalachia. This curriculum explores economic and governance systems through a participatory community-based process to create knowledge and share solutions that foster community, equity and healthy communities. Interviewees also elevated the Solidarity Economy in the South report¹² that Highlander has developed, and the regional Solidarity Economy in the South Network that it has been working to build and sustain. The Beautiful Solutions¹³ piece was also highlighted as an effective way to inspire just transition work by elevating examples that already exist today. Finally, the Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program was highlighted as an effective leadership development program that created a network of young leaders in the region who were instilled with an important set of values, principles, and analytical frameworks. Interviewees noted that the program is an example of real resources and human capacity coming to support regional just transition work.



Letcher County Culture Hub

www.letcherculture.org

The Letcher County Culture Hub is a growing network of community-led organizations in Letcher County, Kentucky, who work together to build a culture and economy where “we own what we make.” The Culture Hub’s twenty-plus current partners include community centers, local businesses and development associations, artist and artisan organizations, volunteer fire departments, public and educational organizations, and nonprofit corporations in the fields of agriculture, tech, media, housing, and recreation.

Appalachian Land Study

www.appalachianlandstudy.org

The Appalachian Land Study is a collaborative public research effort among diverse stakeholders in Central Appalachia that began to take shape in the fall of 2016. Inspired by the historic 1979 Appalachian Land Ownership Study, they are documenting patterns of land and resource ownership and the revenues they generate, as well as studying communities’ own relationships to the land. Interviewees highlighted this initiative as an effective way to conduct participatory research, empower community activists with knowledge, and build local, place-based movements.

Center for Resilient Communities at West Virginia University

<https://resilientcommunities.wvu.edu/about>

The Center for Resilient Communities is a learning laboratory, a field station, an experimental space and a makershop for action research and community transformation. As an institution, it fosters the development of grassroots, ground-up, enlightened strategies to address our most pressing problems and aims to cultivate a diverse network of grassroots leaders, scholars and students who are committed to advancing just, equitable and resilient communities in West Virginia and around the world.



Restoration of African American histories in Harlan County, Kentucky

In Harlan County, Kentucky, the towns of Cumberland, Benham, and Lynch have been actively working to uncover African American histories in their communities, particularly the significance of their labor in the coal industry. Interviewees shared that through these community-driven, place-based initiatives, people have been actively involved in maintaining and developing community space. For example, Lynch, Kentucky is using its assets as a former coal-mining town to create successful cultural heritage tourism opportunities.

As highlighted in an [article in Politico Magazine](#),¹⁴ “Lynch is located in far southeastern Kentucky on the border with Virginia and was founded in 1917 by the U.S. Coal and Steel company. The company bought 19,000 acres for the town and built everything from houses and stores to a hospital and baseball field. At its peak, Lynch had about 10,000 residents, but is down to below 1,000 today. Between 1950 and 1970, the population of Lynch dropped by about half as the biggest coal companies left town and jobs declined. Today, there are no working coal mines. Like many coal towns across the region, Lynch and the two former coal towns nearby, Cumberland and Benham, are trying to chart a path forward that might include tourism. The Eastern Kentucky Social Club has long been at the center of African-American life in Lynch, and since 1970, it has hosted meetings for former and current black residents of the town to reunite and honor the contributions of Black coal miners.”

Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation’s FARMACY Program

www.letchercountyfarmersmarket.com/farmacy.html

The FARMACY Program, introduced and sponsored by Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation (MCHC) in 2015, is meant to provide healthy foods to patients with dietary restrictions. With support from Passport Health Plan and WellCare, MCHC is now writing prescriptions for fruits and vegetables to patients to be redeemed at the Letcher County Farmers Market in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Over a nine-week period, \$100,000 worth of produce fresh was paid for by health insurance companies. Not only is the local farmers market more diverse, but this program has allowed local producers to scale up their production. During COVID, they are also giving away meal kits each week. In two weeks, 100,000 meals were distributed at five locations as part of the USDA Summer Food Services Program. “It’s been an amazing thing for both the health of people—customers who are having amazing health results—and for the local producers have guaranteed money,” Ada Smith shared. “These are solutions that should be scaled.”





Call to Action for Racial Equity (CARE) - West Virginia

www.carecoalitionwv.org

Call to Action for Racial Equality (CARE) is a statewide racial justice leader, dismantling oppressive structures plaguing communities of color across West Virginia. CARE builds power that combats systemic racism in West Virginia through community organizing, youth leadership development, and policy change. CARE West Virginia also works on educating primarily white majority organizations about racial justice by conducting an assessment to take stock of where organizations are at and move forward. For a lot of organizations, this means starting with a Social Justice 101 course or thinking about how to diversify their board without doing it in a way that is tokenizing. In some cases, it is also about doing intentional recruitment for positions or changing institutional culture in order to retain People of Color.

Kentucky Rural - Urban Exchange

www.kyrux.org

The Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange (RUX) is a creative leadership program designed to build confidence, grow social capital, and bridge divides to unite Kentuckians. The concept of the program, created by Art of the Rural in Minnesota and Appalshop, is bringing people together across divides and letting them sit together for a weekend three times a year. For the past six years, the program has taken people from across the state to three different communities, including both rural and urban areas. "It really does shift perspectives and it transforms peoples' ideas about place," shared board member Ivy Brashear. "It helps them to see that we are all connected."

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundations's COVID response

www.mrbf.org

The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation (MRBF) is a family foundation based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina that supports partners across 11 southern states. When the COVID pandemic hit, the MRBF board recognized that as a funder they had to be responsive and approved a four-tier platform of decisions. First, they sent \$10,000 to every board-approved grantee partner. Second, they approved an extension to existing grants of one year and front loaded all the money so basically all their partners had two years of funding in their account immediately. Third, they allocated funding to go to emergency relief funds through community foundation partners, knowing that there needed to be some more flexible resources to distribute to groups that MRBF was not aware of and that could be locally controlled. These were focused on supporting Communities of Color, immigrant communities, and those who may not have access to any of the stimulus money, etc. Fourth, for any CDFI loan fund that MRBF has a program-related investment (PRI) with, the foundation eliminated interest on the PRI and converted 20% of the PRI into a grant. This rapid response to the needs of communities is needed by other funders in the region. MRBF has also been going through an internal process of evaluating the impact of structural racism within its institution and is currently reviewing their investments and grantmaking through an equity framework.

Langston High School redevelopment in Johnson City, Tennessee

The nonprofit Langston Education & Arts Development (LEAD) and the City of Johnson City, Tennessee collaborated in a public-private partnership to renovate and transform Langston High School into a new community-based, multicultural arts and education center. This was the original Black high school in Johnson City. The city has allocated \$1.8 million toward the project, while LEAD is working to raise the remaining \$500,000 to completely fund the renovation of the building that housed the county's all-black school. One interviewee described how this happened because city council members, the mayor, and other residents were able to get behind and support a process that was led by the interests and visions of older, retired community members who were alumni of and teachers at this Black school during segregation. This repurposed space now serves as an important site for intergenerational connections and supports the unique programming interests of diverse members of the community.¹⁵

Press On: A Southern Collective for Movement Journalism

www.presson.media

Press On is a Southern media collective that catalyzes change and advances justice through the practice of movement journalism. They are an example of an institution that supports year-long fellowships to intentionally mentor people to produce materially about their own communities. This is more Southern focused, but provides the kind of mentorship and support for people who are in and from the mountains without those connections otherwise that could be useful to have in the Central Appalachian region as well.

Future Generations University's SEED SCALE Approach

www.seed-scale.org

SEED SCALE is a theory and approach on how communities can "advance." It offers a process by which almost any community can direct change underway within it. It is also a system of thought distinctive in "presenting how change emerges from inside groups of people." One interviewee shared that this approach to community work came out of the experiences of faculty working in the field mostly in India and China, but in Appalachia as well, and informs how to do effective economic and community development that lasts.





Models and Case Studies from Beyond the Region

National Level Organizations, Institutions, and Movements

Movement for Black Lives

www.m4bl.org

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is an ecosystem of individuals and organizations creating a shared vision and policy agenda to win rights, recognition, and resources for Black people. M4BL work is deeply rooted in and connected to the South and Appalachia, with Highlander Center Co-Executive Director Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson serving on the leadership team of both M4BL and its accompanying multiracial network The Frontline and Elandria Williams serving a pivotal role at the first National Convening of M4BL and contributing to the development of the policy platform Vision for Black Lives. Many Southern and Appalachian organizers and groups are active members of M4BL, contributing to strategy and policy development in the national coalition. In doing so, the movement makes it possible for Black communities, and therefore everyone, to live healthy and fruitful lives.

Several interviewees elevated the work and policy platform of M4BL as essential to achieving a just transition for Central Appalachia.

Movement Generation

www.movementgeneration.org

Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project inspires and engages in transformative action towards the liberation and restoration of land, labor, and culture. They are rooted in vibrant social movements led by low-income communities and communities of color committed to a just transition away from profit and pollution and towards healthy, resilient and life-affirming local economies. One interviewee shared that they see Movement Generation as having one of the deepest and most holistic critiques and approaches to just transition work.

Climate Justice Alliance

www.climatejusticealliance.org

The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) formed in 2013 to create a new center of gravity in the climate movement by uniting frontline communities and organizations into a formidable force. Their translocal organizing strategy and mobilizing capacity is building a just transition away from extractive systems of production, consumption and political oppression, and towards resilient, regenerative and equitable economies. They believe that the process of transition must place race, gender and class at the center of the solutions equation in order to make it a truly just transition. Several interviewees highlighted CJA as one of the most effective organizations working at the national level that has a particularly transformative approach and is making connections across environmental and racial justice. CJA's Just Transition: A Framework for Change is available online.¹⁶

Seed Commons Financial Wealth Cooperative

www.seedcommons.org

Seed Commons is a national network of locally rooted, non-extractive loan funds that brings the power of big finance under community control. By taking guidance from the grassroots and sharing capital and resources to support local cooperative businesses, they are building the infrastructure necessary for a truly just, democratic and sustainable new economy. Seed Commons has enabled PODER Emma Community Ownership, described above, to engage in their local work and community-based lending. One interviewee noted how Seed Commons provides the backbone (legal support, staff, etc.) so that local loan funds that know their community best do not have to become a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). In this way, Seed Commons raises the capital for lending, but as a local community takes on a loan and repays, those resources remain a source of capital that your community continues to have access to. "This is powerful because as you build your co-op and repay, that is money that now lives in your community and that other cooperatives can borrow from" shared Andrea Golden. This also creates an opportunity for people in the community to learn about how to steward finance and work together to successfully manage some significant community assets.



Economic Analysis and Research Network

www.earn.us

The Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN) is a nationwide network of research, policy, and organizing and advocacy organizations fighting, state by state, for an economy that works for everyone. One interviewee mentioned how EARN brings together policy organizations and grassroots organizations and has them partner to affect change on an issue that would be much more difficult otherwise.

Soul Fire Farm in Grafton New York

www.soulfirefarm.org

Soul Fire Farm is a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-centered community farm located in Grafton, New York that is committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system. They raise and distribute life-giving food as a means to end food apartheid. They also bring diverse communities together to share skills on sustainable agriculture, natural building, spiritual activism, health, and environmental justice.

Indigenous-led Just Transition Movements in Alaska

The Chorus Foundation has learned many lessons from Alaska regarding universal income, and around Indigenous and young leadership.

International Case Studies

There is much that can be drawn from international case studies. Germany and Wales were both mentioned by a few interviewees, and are often looked to as examples of transition.

Germany's Just Transition from a Coal Economy

Germany, which also has cultural and economic ties to the coal industry, may offer one model in how it has brought diverse people to the table in visioning a just transition. Germany's Commission on Growth, Structural Economic Change and Employment was established in June of 2018 and is a task force comprised of 31 members, including representatives from across the country's coal regions, who are creating a roadmap to quickly end coal mining and coal-fired power production to achieve national carbon neutrality by mid-century while also investing in the futures of communities that have sustained this industry and the nation's growth (Löhle, 2019).¹⁷ While the process has required hard conversations and deliberation, the Commission has maintained its commitment to process and ensure that diverse voices are at the table. In addition, Germany covered labor wages for coal miners for 10 years as communities were transitioning.

Wales' Transition from a Coal Monoeconomy

There are several lessons learned in this piece: "The End of Coal Mining in South Wales: Lessons learned from industrial transformation," 2017 GSI [report link](#).¹⁸

APPENDIX A:

Interviewees, Interview Questions, and Notes on Process

This report was authored by Sierra Gladfelter and Christine Gyovai of Dialogue + Design Associates based on content from online interviews conducted with 18 individuals with unique backgrounds and perspectives, identified by Highlander who are working on just transition initiatives across Central Appalachia, in the spring and summer of 2020. Interviewees were selected based on the diversity of perspectives that they could offer on the just transition movement based on their background, age, experience, sector, and geography. Each interviewee received the list of questions below prior to an hour-long interview that was conducted by the Dialogue + Design team. Each conversation was recorded with permission in order to produce an interview transcript that was reviewed by interviewees and then coded for common themes across conversations. This material was then synthesized into a collective interview transcript, or Key Issues Report, that was reviewed by all interviewees and provided both the content and foundation for this report.

The ideas, quotes, and reflections in this report are the collective thinking and vision of the 18 individuals listed below. We are deeply grateful to all of them for sharing their wisdom, experiences, and creative suggestions for how we can build a more just region together.

Interviewees

Ivy Brashear, Mountain Association (formerly Mountain Association for Community Economic Development)

Gabrielle Chapman, Humane Society of the United States

Mekyah Davis, StayTogether Appalachian Youth Project and Black Appalachian Young and Rising

Eric Dixon, Board Member, Highlander Research and Education Center

Anthony Flaccavento, Sequestering Carbon, Accelerating Local Economies Inc.

Rae Garringer, Country Queers

Andrea Golden, Cenzontle Language Justice Cooperative, Dulce Lomita Mobile Home Cooperative, and PODER Emma Community Ownership

Ethan Hamblin, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation

William Isom, Black in Appalachia

Lou Murrey, Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project

Mimi Pickering, Appalshop

Raynalle Rouse, theatre teacher and formerly with Call to Action for Racial Equality (CARE)-West Virginia

Carl Shoupe, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

Ada Smith, Appalshop

Bonnie Swinford, Sierra Club

Lyndsay Tarus, Alliance for Appalachia

Tanya Turner, Chorus Foundation

Stephanie Tyree, West Virginia Community Development Hub



Interview Questions

1. Briefly, please tell us a little about your background and current work – how are you engaged with just transition efforts in the region?
2. What is your vision for a just transition in Central Appalachia? What are the values and principles that inform your vision?
3. What do you see as the greatest opportunities or challenges for advancing the values and principles you are centering in regional just transition work?
4. What are the most important lessons that you have learned through your just transition work (including around the themes of racial justice, intergenerational organizing, and the rural/ urban context)?
5. Have you had any experiences with projects that may have been framed as just transition work but that had alternate effects or unintended consequences?
6. Note: After the first 11 interviews, this question was replaced with the one below to reflect the changing social and political context in which just transition work is currently taking place, especially around racial injustice and global uprising.
7. How can just transition efforts in Central Appalachia better align with and build power with current movements to advance racial justice (i.e. defund the police, bailout funds)?
8. What are the most effective programs, organizations, or community leaders working on just transition work in the region? Are there any specific models that you consider to be most successful in creating lasting change in the region, nationally, or from abroad?
9. Has your organization developed or used any tools or resources that might help advance racial justice, solidarity (or transformative) economies, and social justice in just transition across Central Appalachia?
10. What additional feedback do you have to share, including additional people that might be engaged in this effort?

APPENDIX B:

Organizations and Publications

List of Regional Organizations, Coalitions, and Initiatives

- All Access EKY
- Alliance for Appalachia
- Appalachian African-American Cultural Center, Pennington Gap, VA
- Appalachian Center for Economic Networks
- Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
- Appalachian Funders Network
- Appalachian Impact Fund
- Appalachian Land Study
- Appalachian Media Institute
- Appalachian Sustainable Development
- Appalachian Voices
- Appalshop
- Asheville Survival Program
- Black Appalachian Young and Rising
- Black in Appalachia Podcast
- Black in Boone
- Black Sheep Bakery
- Black Soil: Our Better Nature
- Blount County Public Library
- The Bottom, Knoxville
- Call to Action for Racial Equity (CARE)- West Virginia
- Center for Rural Strategies
- Central Appalachian Network
- Cenzontle Language Cooperative
- Chorus Foundation
- Coalfield Development Corporation
- Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- COAP Inc.
- Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky
- Community Economic Development Network of East Tennessee
- Community Farm Alliance
- Country Queers
- Daily Yonder
- Downstream Strategies
- Dulce Lomita Mobile Home Cooperative
- EKY Mutual Aid
- Financial Literacy Bootcamp
- Future Generations University's SEED-SCALE
- Generation West Virginia
- Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation
- Grow Appalachia
- Higher Ground in Harlan County
- Highlander Research and Education Center
- Holler Health Justice
- ICE Out of East Tennessee
- Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
- Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange
- Knoxville Abortion Doula Collective
- Knoxville Black Mama's BailOut
- Knoxville City Council Movement
- Letcher County Culture Hub
- Letcher Governance Project
- Making Connections News
- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- Mountain Association (formerly Mountain Association for Community Economic Development)
- Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation's FARMACY Program
- Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative
- One Foundation
- 100 Days in Appalachia
- Our Future West Virginia
- PODER Emma Community Ownership
- Porch Sitters of Appalachia
- Press On: A Southern Collective for Movement Journalism
- Project South
- Rural Support Partners
- Scalawag
- Sexy Sex Ed
- Sister Song
- Solidarity Economy in the South Network Southerly
- Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards
- Southern Connected Communities Project
- Southern Movement Assembly
- Southern Reparations Loan Fund Network
- Southerners on New Ground
- Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment
- STAY Together Appalachia Project
- Tennessee Appalachian Communities Economics
- West Virginia Community Development Hub
- West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities

List of National Organizations, Coalitions, and Initiatives

- Climate Justice Alliance
- Black Lives Matter Network
- BlueGreen Alliance Economic Transition Platform
- Climate Justice Alliance
- Dream Defenders
- Economic Analysis and Research Network
- Just Transition Alliance
- Magic City Youth Initiative
- Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) Policy Platform
- Movement Generation
- New Economy Coalition
- People's Movement Assembly
- RECLAIM Act Working Group
- Seed Commons Financial Wealth Cooperative
- Sierra Club
- Southern Reparations Loan Fund

Publications and Resources

- Abandoned Mine Land Program: A Policy Analysis for Central Appalachia and the Nation published by Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and the Alliance for Appalachia.
- Beautiful Solutions curated by This Changes Everything.
- *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by Adrienne Maree Brown.
- The Freedom Papers published by Dream Defenders.
- Jemez Principles: On December 6-8, 1996, forty People of Color and European-American representatives met in Jemez, New Mexico, for the "Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade." The Jemez meeting was hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice with the intention of hammering out common understandings between participants from different cultures, politics and organizations. The following "Jemez Principles" for democratic organizing were adopted by the participants including: #1 Be Inclusive. #2 Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing. #3 Let People Speak for Themselves. #4 Work Together In Solidarity and Mutuality #5 Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves #6 Commitment to Self-Transformation.
- Just Transition: Love It, Hate It: You've Heard the Term, Now Hear the Story webinar hosted by the Labor Network for Sustainability and the Just Transition Listening Project (a partnership of several organizations).
- Just Transition Principles and Framework for Change by the Climate Justice Alliance.
- Mapping Our Futures: Economics & Governance curriculum developed by Highlander Research and Education Center.
- The People's Vision for a Democratic, Just and Green TVA 2020 published by members of the Tennessee Valley Energy Democracy Movement, including Appalachian Voices, Science for the People and Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment.
- Report on Coal Mine Bonding in Central Appalachia published by the Alliance for Appalachia.
- Revitalizing Appalachia: A Toolkit for cleanup and community development published by the Alliance for Appalachia.
- Solidarity Economy in the South report published by Highlander.
- *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* by Appalachian historian Jessica Wilkerson.
- A Vision For Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice published by Movement for Black Lives.

APPENDIX C:

Endnotes and Image Credits

Endnotes

1. See website at this link: <https://www.blackinappalachia.org/podcast>
2. See website at this link: <http://www.knoxnews.com/story/opinion/2020/06/03/community-members-should-have-say-what-city-budget-funds/3126941001/>
3. See website at this link: <http://www.medium.com/@citycouncilmovement/a-knoxville-for-some-proposed-city-budget-reveals-mayors-priorities-and-who-continues-to-get-abc31b128a72>
4. See website at this link: <https://southernersonnewground.org/our-work/freedomfear/black-mamas-bail-out-action/>
5. For additional information see website at this link: <https://reclaimact.com/local-support>
6. See quote from the website at this link: www.theallianceforappalachia.org
7. One definition and framework for understanding the principle of accompaniment is articulated by the West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities here: <https://resilientcommunities.wvu.edu/about/principles>
8. See All Access EKY website at this link: <https://www.allaccesseky.org/>
9. See Workforce Development Model at this link: <https://coalfield-development.org/coalfields-33-6-3-model-featured-in-world-bank-group-publication/>
10. See Making Connections News at this link: <https://www.makingconnectionsnews.org/>
11. See Mapping Our Futures at this link: <https://highlandercenter.org/our-impact/economics-governance/>
12. See Solidarity Economy in the South report at this link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15FJeQ0tb2dmsa_a0ebcCcOMGFvDiK2dOG/view?usp=sharing
13. See The Beautiful Solutions website at this link: <https://solutions.thischangeseverything.org/>
14. See article in Politico Magazine at this link: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/22/black-appalachia-215296>
15. See article in the Herald & Tribune at this link: <http://www.heraldandtribune.com/local-news/langston-building-to-serve-the-community-once-again>
16. See website at this link: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition>
17. Löhle, N. (2019, August 30). "Germany's Coal Commission—An Institutional Approach to Phase-out of Coal? Just Transition Fund." Retrieved from: <https://www.justtransitionfund.org/blog/germanys-coal-commission-an-institutional-approach-to-phase-out-of-coal>
18. Report retrieved from: <https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/end-of-coal-mining-south-wales-lessons-learned.pdf>

Image Credits

- Image on page 4: E (seated, front, in black dress) with the first cohort of the Appalachian Transition Fellowship and members of the Eastern Kentucky Social Club in Lynch, KY (2014).
- Black in Appalachia Podcast image on page 14 from the website: <https://www.blackinappalachia.org/podcast>
- Knoxville Black Mama's BailOut image on page 15 from the website: <https://southernersonnewground.org/our-work/freefromfear/black-mamas-bail-out-action/>
- Knoxville City Council Movement image on page 23 provided by Knoxville City Council Movement.
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