



# Strengthening Community Capacity Working Group

A regional approach to local community development

This proposal outlines the plans that the Strengthening Community Capacity Working Group (SCCWG) has developed to address underlying capacity challenges and opportunities many rural Appalachian communities face. It focuses on three levels of engagement within the region's nonprofit and place-based funding sectors and provides larger funders with guidance for making targeted investments that build on current momentum.

## **Our Approach: *Building Community Capacity for Sustainable Progress***

The SCCWG defines community capacity as the ability to plan, implement, and sustain enduring and widely-shared political, social, and/or economic prosperity. Healthy people, a skilled work force, access to technology, and basic infrastructure are crucial components of a robust economy. Rural areas face unique challenges growing a diverse economy. With fewer people dispersed over a mountainous geography, scarce resources, limited access to broadband and capital, they are woefully under-resourced.<sup>1</sup> The SCCWG has identified a regional approach that builds capacity at the three levels detailed below.

### **1. Increase Capacity of Place-Based Foundations to Do Capacity-Building Work**

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Appalachia's place-based foundations (community, small family, and community-oriented foundations) are community partners who make strategic investments to strengthen capacity, develop effective local leadership, broker partnerships, and advance systems and policies that improve livelihoods. With deep knowledge and roots in local communities these foundations are in position to accurately understand challenges, identify opportunities, give voice to the realities on the ground, and enable local people to build prosperity in their own communities. A strong infrastructure of place-based foundations working to build local capacity is essential to the Appalachian transition. And their infrastructure would be greatly improved by resolving these challenges:

- Place-based funders have limited investment capital to adequately fund community-led efforts
- Place-based funders may also have limited staff resources or experience that prevents them from playing a more direct and proactive leadership role in their communities.
- Some areas are not served by any local funders, leaving disparities in communities' access to funding.

### **2. Connect and Strengthen the Capacity-Building Infrastructure in the Region**

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In Central Appalachia, often one or two organizations spur local engagement, leadership and entrepreneurship in individual communities, ranging from community colleges and universities to local foundations, to anchor nonprofits. Yet across Central Appalachia, these capacity builders are not well connected to each other around the complex work it takes to build community capacity. Each capacity-builder faces similar challenges and has learned how to address many of them. When these organizations connect to form a network, new knowledge, shared practices, and collaborations emerge. Over time, the network accelerates change and enjoys greater power and influence than was possible through individual action. The SCCWG seeks to foster a regional network of capacity builders who:

- Share best practices for capacity-building strategies to understand what works in communities
- Align efforts across the region to spur synergetic partnerships
- Innovate and incorporate new models into their own efforts to generate greater impact
- Collaborate across individual service areas for a larger region-wide capacity building strategy

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Appalachian Coal Country receives \$43 per capita in grantmaking compared to \$4,095 in San Francisco. (From: [As the South Grows: Strong Roots](#), NCRP: 2017.)



### 3. Strengthen Community Capacity Through Leadership Development

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An essential element of advancing an equitable Appalachian transition is local people leading the way. From funders, nonprofit leaders and local elected officials to teachers and business owners, leadership is critical at all levels. Likewise, leadership across the region should be able to create the space for meaningful relationships and cross-sector collaboration. The SCCWG seeks to build the capacity of nonprofit and local leaders to:

- Ensure leadership development spreads the transition movement into the hills and hollers.
- Include marginalized populations to ensure communities take equitable steps toward development.
- Lift up young, educated talent to encourage more next generation leaders to stay in the region.
- Promote a culture of leadership that understands the big picture, invites other perspectives, and creates the conditions that produce lasting change.

### Moving Forward: *Learning & Analysis for Action*

The ultimate goal of the SCCWG is to create the conditions for communities to plan, implement, and sustain political, social, and/or economic change that is inclusive and beneficial for the region. To this end, members will assess the landscape and best practices of place-based foundations, capacity building organizations, and leadership development. Critically, the group seeks to increase capacity building funding to the region by connecting existing resources and engaging national funders in this work. Their overarching objectives across the focus areas are to:

- **Lead:** Establish the Network as a catalyst and advocate for cross-sector community capacity building in central Appalachia; use the Network's unique position as a bridge between place-based and national funders and community nonprofits.
- **Learn:** Identify and promote the funding and implementation of the most effective and place-appropriate community capacity building strategies and methods.
- **Analyze:** Quantify and assess resources, successes, opportunities, threats, and gaps related to place-based funders and capacity building organizations in Central Appalachia; serve as a thought leader and clearinghouse for knowledge and resources on community capacity building.
- **Act:** Implement pilot projects that incorporate the proven practices, tools, resources, and actors identified in prior collaborative work.

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#### SCCWG Member Organizations

Appalachian Community Fund  
Appalachian Regional Commission  
Athens County Foundation  
East Tennessee Foundation  
The Educational Foundation of America  
Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky  
Foundation for Appalachian Ohio  
The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation  
Parkersburg Area Community Foundation  
Philanthropy West Virginia  
Thompson Charitable Foundation  
Orton Family Foundation  
Virginia Tech Foundation

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The SCCWG stands poised to foster learning and collaboration among capacity-building and leadership development actors in the region. Together, these place-based funders will use their intimate understanding of their communities' strengths and needs to make the most of limited resources and serve as a strategic partner for national funders interested in supporting capacity building work on the ground. For more information on how to support and engage in this work, contact the SCCWG co-chairs, Susan Urano, Athens County Foundation ([susan@athensfoundation.org](mailto:susan@athensfoundation.org)) and Jeff Mansour, Thompson Charitable Foundation ([jeff@thompsoncharitable.org](mailto:jeff@thompsoncharitable.org)).