

**Appalachian Regional Development Initiative
Listening Session and Online Outreach Report
May 27, 2010**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ARC and USDA, along with a host of federal agencies, convened five community listening sessions across Appalachia and conducted online outreach in an effort to help the federal government formulate strategies to strengthen and diversify the Appalachian regional economy and better coordinate federal efforts in the Region. The following report summarizes the feedback we received through the listening sessions and online outreach efforts, and is based on the “Total Community Development Model”.

Leadership Infrastructure

Local Leadership Issues

At each Listening Session and in the feedback from the online outreach website, issues surrounding local leadership dominated the discussion. Generally speaking, most participants believed that there is a serious lack of adequate local and county civic leadership, but that this problem could be addressed through improved recruitment efforts and training programs for local officials.

Coordination, Cooperation, and Control

Many participants provided a range of feedback pertaining to the importance of coordinated, cooperative economic development efforts. A few participants strongly believed in the importance of local control and decision-making.

Strategic Planning

Participants largely emphasized the importance of long-term strategic community and economic development planning on a regional level.

Human and Social Capital

Workforce Training/Education

Participants across the board generally agreed on the need for improved education systems and workforce training programs to increase economic opportunity in the region. Participants shared a wide range of creative ideas for how to achieve this end.

Brain Drain and Youth Development

Participants generally expressed concern at the rate with which educated people are leaving the Appalachian region. There was also widespread concern over the general lack of civic engagement and leadership among Appalachian youth.

Attitudes and Values

Participants expressed a wide range of views relating to the general attitude and values of the Appalachian region and its people. Comments focused on attitudes and values surrounding work ethic and social trust and cohesion.

Support Systems

Health Care

Participants at several sessions discussed the need for healthcare professionals and quality services in the Appalachia Region. The major focus is to create incentives to attract doctors and health care professionals.

Education

One of the biggest issues across all of the sessions was education and the need to provide a relevant and hands-on 21st Century education, especially in K-12. More specifically, the focal point was on curriculum development, drop-out prevention, and youth leadership/civic programs.

Financing

Participants at most of the listening sessions were concerned with access to capital/credit. In connection, there was a great desire for small business/entrepreneurship development support.

Physical Infrastructure

Water and Sewer

Participants were predominately concerned with aging systems and funding issues. Issues were related to insufficient funding for infrastructure, the challenges faced by small rural towns to obtain federal funding, and the overall lack of a comprehensive plan to address problems.

Transportation

Participants at several meetings discussed the isolation created by the lack of accessibility to and connectivity between roads, rail and air travel.

Telecommunications

Need for broadband access and the related infrastructure costs were very common topics at all of the outreach meetings. Similar topics also dominated the physical infrastructure section of the on-line outreach website.

Other/Industrial parks/Waste Management/Housing

A small number of participants at one or two sessions discussed the merits of industrial parks and a need for more quality housing. In addition, there were a fair number of online outreach comments related to recycling though the issue did not come up during the listening sessions.

Economic Base

Economic Diversification

Participants at all the listening sessions spent a fair amount of time discussing the need to broaden/diversify their local economies through the development of small businesses, tourism, locally produced products and renewable energy technologies. The comments in the economic base section of the online outreach predominately expressed support for coal-mining and tourism.

Asset-Based Development/Local First

This topic was often mentioned in tandem with economic diversification. Participants at nearly every session discussed the need to develop and promote local assets and increase tourism. This was also mentioned a lot in the online outreach, especially the utilization of natural resources as a method of bringing people to Appalachia.

Energy

This subject matter came up repeatedly at all of the sessions. Participants were concerned about the uncertainty of mining and/or manufacturing industries and hoped that the exploration of alternative energies could not only produce jobs, but increase energy efficiency, create potential cost savings and help safeguard the environment. Collectively, many comments from the online outreach stressed the development of alternative energy for the sake of job creation as well as for environmental preservation.

Other/Natural Environment***Natural resources***

Many participants were concerned with conserving, renewing and managing the Region's natural resources. The preservation of the natural environment and its promotion for economic development purposes was a common theme at the listening sessions and in the online outreach.

Water quality

Participants, mainly at the session in Pipestem, WV, discussed the need for water quality improvements. Similar concern was expressed on the online outreach website as well.

Message to Federal Government

Participants across all of the sessions generally thought federal agencies should collaborate more and coordinate better with one another, simplify and increase the flexibility of grant applications and respond to them more quickly, listen more closely to the people on the ground, and generally "don't forget the rural areas".

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ARDI COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

In the fall of 2009, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and a host of federal agencies launched the “Appalachian Regional Development Initiative” (ARDI) to develop short- and long-term federal strategies to diversify and strengthen the Appalachian regional economy and better coordinate federal efforts in the region.

In order to gain a better understanding of the region’s priorities and needs, ARC and USDA convened five listening sessions across Appalachia in March and April of 2010. Sessions took place in Pennsylvania, Alabama, North Carolina, West Virginia and Kentucky. Over 440 Appalachians attended the sessions, including representatives from state and local governments, not-for-profits, community organizations, and business and industry. Each meeting was conducted by a professional facilitator and members of the Working Group took thorough notes to ensure that participants’ views were recorded. In addition, the ARDI Working Group launched an online public comments page to gather feedback from stakeholders across the region, and over 200 comments were received.

Compiled below are comments collected from the five listening sessions and the public comment page. The “Total Community Development Model” served as a guide for all five listening sessions and the online feedback page. Discussion focused on the areas of the model’s five pillars: Leadership Infrastructure, Human and Social Capital, Support Systems, Physical Infrastructure, and Economic Base. The Natural Environment, which cross-cuts the entire model, is included in the final section. Finally, a short summary of the most prevalent issues that arose at each individual listening session is included at the end of the report.

It is our hope that this report will serve as a starting point for an interdepartmental dialogue that will develop concrete short- and long-term federal strategies for the Appalachian region.

IMPORTANT: The views and perspectives in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of USDA, ARC, or any members of the ARDI Working Group. The intent of the document is to provide the Working Group with a summary of the feedback we received, not to endorse or refute any opinion or perspective.

I. Leadership Infrastructure

Strong local leadership is crucial to an economically self-sustaining community. Such leadership is needed to conduct meaningful strategic planning as well as to execute actual development efforts.

A. Local Leadership Issues

At each Listening Session and in the feedback from the online outreach website, issues surrounding local leadership dominated the discussion. Generally speaking, most participants believed that there is a serious lack of adequate local and county civic leadership, but that this problem could be addressed through improved recruitment efforts and training programs for local officials.

Challenges

- Communities lack true leadership. The people in charge do not have the capacity, training, or ability to lead and empower citizens, are disconnected from the communities, seem resistant to change, are risk-averse, and seem to be wearing out.
- Local leadership is weak, fragmented, and overwhelmed
- County leadership is woefully ignorant of modern economic development techniques but rarely willing to take the time and effort to learn differently.
- Local leadership is often corrupt, not accountable to constituents
- Lack of incentives for people to participate; lack of diversity in decision-makers; lack of prioritization of goals
- Local leadership is controlled politically and traditionally by entrenched special interests that have a stake in preserving the status quo rather than stimulating new thinking and approaches to economic development.
- There are many strong leaders in our communities, but most work in the private sector where pay scales are often much higher.
- Our primary issue with leadership is that the Federal government will not allow us to exercise it. We have talented local leaders that recognize the needs of our communities and need to have the freedom to exercise that leadership and make choices that best benefit our communities.
- The longer the person has been in the position of county leadership, the less engaged and effective they become.

Opportunities

- Need to train and educate existing leaders and elected officials, and focus on getting new people involved. A best practices training program for local officials is needed. Provide opportunities for Appalachian civic leaders to interface with leaders from other parts of the country to get ideas and a new perspective.
- There is a need for affordable leadership and strategic visioning training for rural community leaders - but it needs to be available IN their communities at a time convenient to them.
- Focus leadership training for those who plan to stay in their communities

- More utility board training, asset management training, financial training, and rate setting training for local officials (clerks, mayors, administrators, and council members).
- Establish local advisory panels; get right people at the table to discuss issues
- Establish public/private partnerships instead of depending only on government
- Encourage local leaders/communities to include youth in leadership development
- Expand civics programs at local middle and high schools
- Seek leadership from grassroots leaders who works across traditional barriers of race & class
- The Appalachian community contains quality institutions of higher learning – we must exploit these knowledge and community resources more.

B. Coordination, Cooperation, and Control

Many participants provided a range of feedback pertaining to the importance of coordinated, cooperative economic development efforts. A few participants strongly believed in the importance of local control and decision-making.

Challenges

- Programs, policies and mindsets at the federal, state and local levels perpetuate a continued silo approach to planning and development, limiting the return on investment and community engagement
- Lack of regional visioning among regional communities – individual communities try to do too much in isolation
- Lack of communication among various actors in community/economic development efforts means people lack information about funding resources, fail to connect to planning resources
- Resistance to regionalism and collaboration leads to inefficient fragmentation and duplication of services
- High turnover of elected officials makes it difficult to do long-term planning
- Business and government don't work together enough
- Allow the local population to decide what they want and then help in the least meddlesome way. I believe most of us here think most decisions should go no higher than the state level. We still have some say to this leadership and feel our voices are somewhat heeded. Whereas "Washington" pretty much ignores our concerns and ideas.
- Local leadership is the only way for an area to grow

Opportunities

- Renew commitment to regional organizations/regional delivery mechanisms like ARC's Local Development Districts
- Renew commitment to federal support of regional strategic planning; review and reduce federal policies that encourage fragmentation
- Provide incentives for multi-jurisdictional/regional planning – for example, raise/lower per capita allocations

- Need for developing a regional mindset that will focus on collaboration and shared resources rather than in-fighting and competition for funding.
- Standard economic incentives across counties; share costs and revenues
- Improve communication strategies to include more stakeholders
- Establish local advisory panels; get right people at the table to discuss critical issues
- Minimize traditional county boundaries; encourage states and agencies to use same counties or districts when drawing lines of responsibility/service areas too many units of local government confuses
- Consult local mayors, stakeholders, non-profit groups, etc.

C. Strategic Planning

Participants largely emphasized the importance of long-term strategic community and economic development planning on a regional level.

Challenges

- Over-emphasis on short-term strategic economic development planning – need to focus on long term
- Local leadership is either unfamiliar with the importance of strategic planning or unwilling to bring people together to formulate a plan for the region
- People may have the best intentions but oftentimes they do not know how to approach formulating an economic or community development plan
- The vision must first come from within. That no longer seems possible for some of the communities in this region. Either due to lack of experience or desire but the mentality has become the come do it for us style. Without the ability to decide their own future it cannot be accomplished.
- Lack of planning infrastructure/use of local assets

Opportunities

- I think small town areas need an established framework to follow when trying to improve tourism, grow local business, or improve downtown areas. There are enough success stories and professional out there, small towns shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel in their own area
- Strategic planning needs to include blocks of counties working together to provide larger numbers of employees for potential for employers. Working together will help us attract more business and industry.
- Encouraging more community members to get involved with their county/city comprehensive plan -- and insist their elected leaders follow it.
- Planning should be done on a regional level, with local buy-in.
- Local communities need to conduct an inventory of assets to assess what they have.
- Stop reinventing the wheel. Find a successful program and duplicate it.

II. Human and Social Capital

A strong leadership infrastructure helps to nurture growth of social cohesion, mutual trust amongst individuals, government entities, and private institutions, and common attitudes and values. This category also includes the knowledge and skill sets of the local or regional workforce.

A. Workforce Training/Education

Participants across the board generally agreed on the need for improved education systems and workforce training programs to increase economic opportunity in the region. Participants shared a wide range of creative ideas for how to achieve this end.

Challenges

- Education for 21st century jobs must address the current mismatch between skill strengths and 21st century job opportunities
- Basic trades used to be trained through apprenticeships or in high school – this does not happen anymore
- Low educational attainment levels for the region and low access to post secondary education is a big problem – a high school diploma nowadays guarantees nothing but poverty unless there is follow-up such as college, vocational, or technical training.
- Retraining not keeping pace with job losses; outflow of jobs is faster than creation of new ones
- Increased productivity has reduced number of workers needed
- Need to better understand and define entrepreneurialism
- Workforce is aging dramatically
- Community-based schools are a critical element in the development of a local civic culture and a sense of community engagement. The trend over the last four decades has led to the consolidation of rural schools and disengagement of schools from community and economic development at the local level.
- Workforce training programs and business sector are not on the same page

Opportunities

- Need to expand funding of student internships and develop a curriculum at levels that will provide youth with best opportunities in local job market
- Education and training should be focused on the needs and resources of a region
- Need more emphasis on education and workforce training in technology fields to help diversify region's economy
- Shift education to focus on entrepreneurs / expand capital resources for entrepreneurs
- Establish more good jobs by enabling local businesses to scale up
- Fund workforce upgrades and replacement work programs (non-college credit earnings)
- Consolidate various programs into one comprehensive training program under the umbrella of community college systems
- Implement quick, practical programs that train displaced workers (JOBS now)
- Expand distance learning opportunities with better access to technology

- Exchange education tuition for public service in areas of healthcare and education
- Strengthen partnerships between employers, educators, workforce development agencies
- Government investment in the development of green job training programs would be key, as green companies would offer jobs that pay well in our mountain communities.
- We should engage in a critical examination of public and fiscal policy to design strategies for decentralizing schools back to local communities in rural places. This should include innovative use of distance and social networking technologies to link small rural schools to broader external learning resources.
- Stronger school systems, especially in the middle and high school years, including updated curriculum and technology resources.

B. Brain Drain and Youth Development

Participants generally expressed concern at the rate with which educated people are leaving the Appalachian region. There was also widespread concern over the general lack of civic engagement and leadership among Appalachian youth.

Challenges

- Problem of brain drain – difficulty attracting recent college graduates to stay or return to work in Appalachian region
- Most educated youth are leaving area
- Young people get frustrated with how long it takes to do things in local government (young people think and operate differently than older generation); lack of interest among young people in government/politics/public service
- Press/local media often vilifies local government decisions so youth get bad opinion
- Low population diversity – age levels too homogenous
- Youth who are un-involved in the community can sink into a criminal lifestyle more easily. They can also grow up ignorant to the importance of community. Conversely, an engaged youth have proven to produce enormously successful projects. They are in touch with contemporary ideas and will suppress out-dated thinking.
- Increasing bent towards entitlement among youth

Opportunities

- ARC should facilitate AmeriCorps/Vista program, spreading volunteers and intern leaders throughout communities of Appalachia to counteract brain drain
- Provide free post-secondary education for free if youth stay in county for 5 years
- Create incentives for college graduates to work in rural areas/in Appalachia
- Fund “local” schools to prevent the brain drain
- Develop/create jobs/industries in Appalachia that attract young people
- I would like to see a program started with freshman males in every high school. These males would be paid to come to class once a month on Saturday and would be exposed to subjects such as manners, financial planning, job motivation, visits to colleges, etc. for their entire freshman year..

- Need for educating youth about negative impacts of drug use and addiction
- Need for career/college planning for high school students – students too often complete high school with no plans for the future.
- Encourage youth participation on boards/local organizations

C. Attitudes and Values

Participants expressed a wide range of views relating to the general attitude and values of the Appalachian region and its people. Comments focused on attitudes and values surrounding work ethic and social trust and cohesion.

Challenges

- Attitudes of hopelessness due to high levels of poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, low educational attainment, etc. lead to paralysis
- Racism is an issue that needs to be addressed at all levels
- Breakdown of family/community support systems
- Perception of poor work ethic contributes to a downward spiral of negative attitude.
- Generally speaking there is a strong work ethic in this area; problem is lack of opportunity
- Because of poverty, social trust has been fractured
- Having a job and doing it right has always been important to the people here, though this attitude has been eroding over the past 25 or so years due to the complete loss of glass/steel industries
- For people who come from working families there is a strong work ethic, but if a family has been on public assistance for generations the work ethic may be lacking; in some cases, less access to entitlement programs would necessitate some individuals actually getting a job and working, rather than living off entitlement programs.
- There continues to be very little social trust in Appalachia towards government entities.
- While community spirit and work ethic are strong, it seems that social trust and cohesion are lacking.

Opportunities

- Faith based organizations are in a unique position to accomplish good in the community because they already have a committed group of interested people within the community where the need is
- Churches (many denominations), local charities and community groups have significant roles in the area. We contribute to them and see the benefits first hand.
- Support initiatives to fight racism, classism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination.
- The most important resource in a community is human capital: Not bureaucrats or their decision making but ordinary and interested humans who live in and know the local communities well.
- Friends and neighbors often solve problems with common sense, not the textbook solutions that work well in graduate school or in the close confines of the bureaucracy.

- Instill value of family across Appalachian region – it's a great resource/opportunity
- We need to ensure that our communities have attitudes that focus on what is wise in the long term instead of what is easy or convenient in the short term.

III. Support Systems

Communities rely upon support systems that provide critical services ranging from health care to education to housing and recreational opportunities. These support systems are not necessarily primary economic drivers, but they are essential building blocks for any community.

A. Health Care

Participants at several sessions discussed the need for healthcare professionals and quality services in the Appalachia Region. The major focus is to create incentives to attract doctors and health care professionals.

Challenges

- Changing demographics and a lack of preventive actions overburden existing health care resources
- Lack of incentives to attract doctors/specialists to underserved rural communities
- Lack of affordable health care and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs
- Aging population will need more healthcare
- Multigenerational drug abuse hurts economic development in region

Opportunities

- Enhance health education and prevention in schools and community (obesity and chronic disease management)
- Provide wellness education encourage life style change - obesity – opportunities for prevention not treatment
- Consolidate/specialize health care services - two or three hospitals often serve the same area and are redundant yet there remains a challenge to offer services in close proximity to relatively isolated areas.
- Regulations can be helpful and protect lives and companies – just lost 29 people in mine disaster; we lose people from black lung everyday
- Prevention is key – institute substance abuse prevention and treatment to tackle lower level problems before law enforcement becomes involved
- Decriminalize drug use or have alternative sentencing

B. Education

One of the biggest issues across all of the sessions was education and the need to provide a relevant and hands-on 21st Century education, especially in K-12. More specifically, the focal point was on curriculum development, drop-out prevention, and youth leadership/civic programs.

Challenges

- Drop-out rates are high and education attainment is low

- Youth are leaving for urban areas creating a brain drain
- Dysfunctional relationship between education and economic development
- Lack of affordable post-secondary education
- Fragmented education system
- 21st century education does not meet the needs of 21st Century economic well-being
- Culture that undervalues education
- Lack of affordable quality childcare options in rural areas

Opportunities

- Focus on K-12 education
- Need educational curriculum that support 21st century careers, careers in alternative energy/green jobs
- Distance learning needs to be available to all high school students, and should utilize distance learning centers for economic development
- Strengthen/expand community colleges
- Fund summer youth programs and provide bright/gifted students with interesting opportunities
- Drop-out programs should focus on the family and utilize graduation mentors.
- Make youth education relevant, inclusive, and motivational to fight negative education culture and to properly of prepare youth for jobs NOW (Focus on Youth!)
- Support education beyond the high school level for the non-college-going kids. Re-institute "Shop Class" and expand vocational opportunities and remove stigma.
- Use High Schools as Think Tanks to involve youth in community and expand their experience/ stretch capacity for area development Involving colleges / universities with local communities to create "think tank" (even on the grade school level).

C. Financing

Participants at most of the listening sessions were concerned with access to capital/credit. In connection, there was a great desire for small business/entrepreneurship development support.

Challenges

- Insufficient access to credit in rural areas makes it difficult to start new businesses or launch new industries to create jobs, bring wealth into communities
- Closed capital markets are destroying jobs in the region

Opportunities

- Create publicly supported business incubator fund and/or revolving loan fund
- Need grant-writing experts to research, write, submit, and manage grants
- Develop business friendly policies at the local, state, and federal levels
- Support small business/entrepreneurs through revolving micro-loan programs
- Infrastructure for entrepreneurs

IV. Physical Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure includes everything from roads and water systems to telecommunications and broadband infrastructure. Development of physical infrastructure is crucial to supporting a thriving, self-sustaining economic base.

A. Water and Sewer

Participants were predominately concerned with aging systems and funding issues. Issues were related to insufficient funding for infrastructure, the challenges faced by small rural towns to obtain federal funding, and the overall lack of a comprehensive plan to address problems.

Challenges

- Aging infrastructure is one of the greatest issues of the region. On lot septic systems are failing and affecting water supplies; some communities still use straight pipes. Water wells have been poisoned by the coal industry.
- Funding is inadequate to address infrastructure problems, particularly for sewer. Appalachian communities cannot meet matching fund requirements and cannot assume additional debt capacity. Limited grant dollars and competition is high; no one wants to deal with loans and their availability is limited too. Funding that is available to put in septic systems often requires homes to be in a certain condition, and residents often cannot afford to make these repairs. Need to increase infrastructure funding 10x or more, and don't mandate without funding.
- Shifting of responsibilities to local government – this is a challenge because local governments can only do what they are allowed to do – in NC, they can only raise revenues in ways the states allows.
- Lack of regional systems that are planned to maximize efficiency; infrastructure planning is needed to avoid haphazard development. Communities don't have skill sets to properly operate and maintain infrastructure – need resources for community utility planning.
- Government at all levels has failed Appalachia with respect to proper water and sewage infrastructure. EPA is more concerned about using the Clean Water Act to advance the administration's political agenda than it is about fecal coli-form pollution in the waters of this region. The coal industry has asked repeatedly to be allowed to use mitigation payments for funding sewage collection projects but EPA has rebuffed each effort. Yet, EPA says mining can have no impact on water quality without violating the Clean Water Act.
- Better storm water management/infrastructure is needed; flooding keeps damaging commercial districts.

Opportunities

- Alternative water & sewer solutions should be allowed, not discouraged. Regulations should be revised to encourage more progressive approaches.
- Infrastructure is not spending – it's investing. It creates jobs and builds future capacity. Best use of federal dollars.

- Broader flexible funding allocations in all fed/state departments to support sound and local plans/priorities. Offer longer term debt of creative funding (grant loan mix)
- Process for local waivers in all regulations/policies
- Host more listening sessions and provide tangible access to administrators and decision makers. Feds should coordinate technical assistance for proposed infrastructure improvements
- Federal government should allow money to piggy-back on infrastructure, so when you dig to install a water line, you also install broadband, telecommunications, etc.
- Create academic/non-profit partnerships with public sector to identify laws/policies that do not work

B. Transportation

Participants at several meetings discussed the isolation created by the lack of accessibility to and connectivity between roads, rail and air travel.

Challenges

- Connectivity needs to be improved, linking Appalachia to business corridors along the eastern U.S. Road system needs to allow easy access from remote locations for hospital care, education opportunities; need a connector between I-64 & I-75. Need better, more competitive airport service.
- Modern highways are essential to progress, particularly in the rugged terrain of the WV, KY and VA coalfields but we are years behind in building such roads. Even when presented with an opportunity to have the route constructed as part of a mining project, the current federal administration is attempting to block such jobs. Without adequate highways and sites on which industry can locate, the coalfields of Appalachia face a very bleak future.
- Conditions of the road network are poor – and adversely affected by mining traffic. Big trucks wreck the roads and are dangerous to drive with.
- Limited public transportation options; what’s there is not affordable and only oriented towards seniors. Need access for general public to all programs and services. Consider high speed rail.
- Leadership at state DOT is inadequate - Lack of planning because of turf wars
- Need to complete four-lane highways and interstates; Finish ADHS

Opportunities

- Linking new transportation investment (\$\$) to global economic opportunities; create connections between communities to share in regional and sub-regional opportunities and economic clusters.
- Underutilized infrastructure (port, transportation system) capacity not fully developed. Need to encourage multi-modal transit; railroads are a key piece that is often forgotten.
- Need to value eco-system services - the value provided by natural systems.

C. Telecommunications

Need for broadband access and the related infrastructure costs were very common topics at all of the outreach meetings. Similar topics also dominated the physical infrastructure section of the on-line outreach website.

Challenges:

- Telecom is insufficient in the region. Where available, prices are high prices and service is poor. High cost of “last mile” means limited access for many rural areas. Residents pay \$80/month for satellite service, and it’s not fast enough to download many links. The system crashes when trying to stream video, or download bigger programs.
- Affordable & dependable high speed broadband & cell service is critical to many areas, including education, transportation (i.e. telecommuting), work force development and business development.
- Planning and construction of the system needs to be taken out of the political arena. Private sector companies have too much influence in where it is (or not) installed. USDA should take the lead to make this happen. Telecommunications companies refuse to expand service to some rural communities - how is that fair? An investment in broadband country-wide is an investment in our nation's economy.

Opportunities

- Organize field trips for funders and policy makers to region so they can see special needs and topography of the region.
- Use the FCC Universal Service fund to address the lack of cell coverage in rural areas.
- Installation of broadband should follow the model of installation of telephone lines, or the REA (Rural Electric Administration in the 30’s - provider of last resort).
- Encourage collaboration between power utilities and ISPs

D. Other/Industrial parks/Waste Management/Housing

A small number of participants at one or two sessions discussed the merits of industrial parks and a need for more quality housing. In addition, there were a fair number of online outreach comments related to recycling though the issue did not come up during the listening sessions.

Challenges

- There is a tendency to build new and not to re-use old (housing, industrial areas, etc.). Instead of going into older neighborhoods and revitalizing, they go out of town and build new (e.g. don’t reuse old building for new grocery, but build new outside of town). Lack of incentives to redevelop vacant or abandoned properties. Need to better maintain what is already there.
- However – it can sometimes be cheaper, more effective, and safer/more sanitary to build new.
- Lack of affordable housing
- Waste and trash removal lacking. Recycling is almost non-existent in many areas and many folks still find it easier to dump trash on the side of the hill than bring it to a waste

disposal facility. How can we keep encouraging people to recycle if there is nowhere for them to do so?

- Our natural resources are being ruined with illegal dump sites. Streams are impaired due to mining, sewage and dumping.
- There is no education to promote recycling.
- Private corporations externalizing costs (public versus private costs)

Opportunities

- Forget industrial parks, which are not sustainable in a new economy of efficiency. Instead, invest in infrastructure that encourages small land-based business development (shared food processing facilities, marketing farmers markets) and go back to co-operative approach.
- Improving housing for low-income people
- Focus on downtown development – too many empty storefronts.
- New parks and park rehabs could promote active health – would be low-cost and high impact.

V. Economic Base

Strength in the areas of leadership infrastructure, human and social capital, support systems, and physical infrastructure should translate into a thriving economic base for a local or regional economy. The economic base can include any industry that creates jobs and produces revenue for a region.

A. Economic Diversification

Participants at all the listening sessions spent a fair amount of time discussing the need to broaden/diversify their local economies through the development of small businesses, tourism, locally produced products and renewable energy technologies. The comments in the economic base section of the online outreach predominately expressed support for coal-mining and tourism.

Challenges

- Declining jobs in manufacturing and mining
- Extractive, undiversified economy
- Lack of economic diversity – too much emphasis on auto industry; region used to be textile based economy, now reliant on auto industry. Area will repeat the same cycle if auto sector moves or declines.
- Agriculture sector is declining. Farmers are aging and not being replaced by younger generation. Need initiatives to attract youth.
- Depopulation, declining incomes, poverty
- Rich in resources, poor in economy
- Government resistance to new approaches; entrenched beliefs, lack of motivation
- Externalized cost of coal industry (health, water, roads)
- Green economy holds potential but is not being given attention and support
- Overemphasis on “new businesses” - older, existing businesses also need tools to grow, innovate and improve

Opportunities

- Diversify economy from mining and manufacturing to sustainable and green.
- Maximize green economy; promote alternative energy. Involve universities for R&D and community college for skills training and certification. Need to support emerging industry.
- Support entrepreneurs and business incubators that create local industry. Small business development could thrive with technical support and access to capital.
- Sustainable Development means meeting the needs of the economy, environment and social issues. All three legs of the stool must be addressed. It is NOT about just something that can pay for itself.
- Broaden definition of economic development (tourism, small business); job diversity
- Need to shift focus from “old” industries like mining/manufacturing to new industries, like health care, service, and high tech; or, adjust 19th/20th century industries and reinvent them for the 21st century.

- The opportunity presented by Marcellus Shale is currently critical to this region
- We have to look at diversifying our economy. Far too long, we have relied on coal only. We must not forget coal, but with needed infrastructure improvements, we can move toward a more broad based economy starting with tourism development, especially in WV
- Coal is the BASE STRENGTH of Appalachia. Coal can support long-term economic development and will create jobs in the Appalachian region for years to come – as long as the government doesn't regulate coal mining out of existence! Everything the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative is looking at, from self-sustaining communities with strong leadership, to a skilled work force or the physical infrastructure of the Appalachian region is related to coal mining in some degree. The funding needed for schools, public works and communities are provided by the revenue and taxes generated by coal. Coal is the nation's most abundant resource and with a two hundred year reserve it's by far the best long-term guarantee for jobs and economic security in Appalachia – no other industry even comes close to providing the level of support, good-paying jobs, economic growth and stability that coal mining can guarantee
- For the benefit of the region and the economic health of the Country, coal production is essential, necessary to keep employment in the region and electricity flowing for the nation until a more economically and environmentally friendly energy source can be developed
- Leave Appalachia and Coal alone! Coal is how I make my living! Are you going to feed me & my family?

B. Asset-Based Development/Local First

This topic was often mentioned in tandem with economic diversification. Participants at nearly every session discussed the need to develop and promote local assets and increase tourism. This was also mentioned a lot in the online outreach, especially the utilization of natural resources as a method of bringing people to Appalachia.

Challenges

- Mono-economy
- Poor access to markets for locally made products
- Poverty and pollution are a bad image for promoting economic development – Appalachia carries bad connotation; hinders/discourages investment

Opportunities

- Study and invoke niche products; utilize and develop existing assets; use natural assets as marketing tool/foundation for economic development
- Focus on developing more resilient local food system by providing more opportunities for family farms to move beyond dairy and corn; organic fruits & vegetables, niche products, wine production, cheese production.

- Use and market natural resources as a market image; Environment as foundation of economic development for either tourism or recreation
- Create regional or state tourism authority to re-branding/marketing Appalachia – as “Mountain Proud”
- Improve Tourism/Recreation – need to develop more attractions (sports, downtowns) and market the existing assets better. Need an RLF to help revitalize historic districts. Mississippi Main Street is very successful, could be model for other areas. Should encourage inter-state partnerships to support tourism as an industry.
- Local first - Utilize and develop existing products and small businesses for quality of life, economic well-being and sustainability
- Focusing on integrated “sustainable” economic development that is “home grown”.
- To ensure long term and stable employment, the people of Appalachia must build industry that capitalizes on existing resources, or develop those resources such that transportation costs are mitigated and that local talents are built upon to provide niche products to a wide audience. Some of these products may involve weaving, quilting, hand crafted furniture, and knitting. In addition, there are many other valuable items crafted in the area that could be showcased and marketed to a broad audience outside of the region.
- We have a beautiful area and a wonderful natural asset in our river frontage. Anything that preserves and builds on that asset will benefit the area. Our heritage is also an asset that could be used for development. Look what the Amish culture has done for certain areas. The Appalachian Culture can translate into tourism and commercial development.

C. Energy

This subject matter came up repeatedly at all of the sessions. Participants were concerned about the uncertainty of mining and/or manufacturing industries and hoped that the exploration of alternative energies could not only produce jobs, but increase energy efficiency, create potential cost savings and help safeguard the environment. Collectively, many comments from the online outreach stressed the development of alternative energy for the sake of job creation as well as for environmental preservation.

Challenges

- Coal has uncertain future; need for new technology
- Don’t allow one industry to dominate entire area-must have diverse economies.
- Lack of understanding of energy efficiency
- Fear of losing existing jobs even if they are not sustainable and hanging on to harmful practices for short term gain (mining – that destroys past mining opportunities). Lack of knowledge of where to go for grants/investments in new opportunities.
- Lack of funding for clean coal technology development

Opportunities

- Invest in “Green and Clean” and renewable energy; build a new, green economy with jobs that last with a living wage made in the USA
- Shift away from coal as fuel for electricity

- Invest in energy R&D (solar, wind, geothermal, nuclear) to promote diversification and sustainability and to create jobs
- Energy efficiency can provide jobs, reduce pollution, and lower utility rates
- Incentives and marketing assistance for energy efficiency upgrades to homes and businesses to provide jobs, reduce pollution, and lower utility rates. There needs to be further education/marketing to businesses, government officials and the general public about the benefits of energy efficiency upgrades to existing buildings that result in quick paybacks. The result is increased jobs for local contractors, increased financial security for building owners & small businesses, money staying local & a lessened impact on the environment.
- Retraining coal miners for other jobs as mining industry retracts for the next couple of decades; long-term program/training is vitally needed
- Use of excess available land mass for alternative energy production

VI. Other/Natural Environment

A. Natural resources

Many participants were concerned with conserving, renewing and managing the Region's natural resources. The preservation of the natural environment and its promotion for economic development purposes was a common theme at the listening sessions and in the online outreach.

Challenges

- Dependence on non-renewable resources
- The mountains should be more than just a source of coal.

Opportunities

- Implement well-planned development and land use policies; diversify land tenure and ownership
- Research and development for green technology
- Promotion of forest resources through education and expansion of forest-specific strategies like the creation of a logger's training academy and a statewide revolving fund specific to the forest industry. Forest sustainability is a must for clean water, jobs, economic development, tourism, carbon storage
- We have a beautiful area and a wonderful natural asset in our river frontage. Anything that preserves and builds on that asset will benefit the area. Our heritage is also an asset that could be used for development. Look what the Amish culture has done for certain areas. The Appalachian Culture can translate into tourism and commercial development.
- In Clay County WV, recycling could be a major boom. Agriculture basis, bee farms, tree farms, fisheries, deer management, along w/ all game species management..using already stripped out mountain removal sites to create energy producing wind farms..the list is potentially endless.
- Conservation Jobs! Our community is our environment. As Appalachians we can't agree on much but we all love this land. It is the livelihood of our past, present and future. There needs to be a real focus on addressing the environmental health issues that Appalachians have been facing for too long. Help us clean up our water and conserve our land, let's support and invest in the most beautiful natural region of this state.

B. Water quality

Participants, mainly at the session in Pipestem, discussed the need for water quality improvements. Similar concern was expressed on the online outreach website as well.

Challenges

- Contamination – need for healthy/clean and dependable water supply
- Stop coal industry pollution from destroying water supply and endangering communities
- Water pollution, particularly SW West Virginia from coal waste hinders economic development; Medical problems from exposure to coal slurry in water supplies

- Public health crisis from mountain top removal, water contamination/pollution.
- Unsanitary sewers
- High rates of illnesses
- Lack of Sewers; salt on roads; chickens/poultry waste; pesticides; Natural Gas – Marcella Shale
- Coal Slurry Recovery- from impoundments- will still discharge the excess water with chemicals used to clean the coal back into the streams. We still have polluted water!

Opportunities

- Health Study on Water Born Illness
- Water Protection measures adopted to protect drinking water systems, private wells and streams. (e.g. Econ. Development that harms H₂O is taxed and regulated and development that protects water is rewarded and incentivized)
- Enforce existing Federal and State laws and attendant regulations
- Investment in infrastructure and preventing further degradation of water.
- Respond to the threats before water supplies are destroyed
- I'm not against underground, responsible mining, but I am against dumping mining waste on coal mining families/communities!
- Do whatever is necessary to prevent the pollution of our drinking water and streams... nothing else will matter if central Appalachia is turned into an inhospitable desert.

VII. Message to Federal Government

Participants across all of the sessions generally thought federal agencies should collaborate more and coordinate better with one another, simplify and increase the flexibility of grant applications and respond to them more quickly, listen more closely to the people on the ground, and generally “don’t forget the rural areas”.

Challenges

- Inflexible public funding/red tape
- Urban bias with federal policies – more difficult for rural areas to access funding/programs
- Funding guidelines should target the neediest counties; funding cycles trip people up and prevent people from applying again.
- Fragmentation and duplication of government efforts
- Poor collaboration/competitive approach of agencies
- Entrepreneurial barriers – for example, to open a new restaurant, you need 34 permits from 34 different agencies
- State and local political corruption
- Non-local ownership
- Restrictions on federal funds for industrial parks/water and sewer
- Funding formulas make it difficult for places with low population densities to access funds
- Too much government regulation results in unintended, negative consequences

Opportunities

- Simplify and accelerate the grants and loans process-make them easier and more uniform across agencies
- Conduct system review of all agencies for duplication of efforts and grants process
- Address inadequate communication between agencies
- Improve communication between Feds and Locals – federal government needs to make concerted effort to ensure local voices are heard
- Recognize in-kind services and volunteer time as a value, should count as a resource or match in the federal grant system.
- More flexible match requirements – allow more things to count as match
- Support set asides for rural
- Focus on community assets
- Approach problems with a sense of urgency
- Locals should be setting the priorities; people on Main Street don’t trust the government and government doesn’t trust the citizens
- Link grants to collaborative projects with partnerships required
- Help groups to work together and avoid silos.

- Explore options for local government revenue generation e.g., market development /guarantees for businesses (like farmers selling to hospitals for food; great unique idea)
- Increase taxes to pay for rural services
- Be inclusive- reach out- use websites more – blogs

VIII. Listening Session Summaries
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LISTENING FORUM #1 – NANTICOKE, PENNSYLVANIA (PA, NY) 8 MARCH 2010

1. LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Resistance to regionalism and collaboration leads to inefficient fragmentation and duplication of services
- High turnover of elected officials makes it difficult to do long-term planning
- Need to train young leaders; lack of youth interest/participation
- Increasing bent towards entitlement among youth

2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Education for 21st century jobs must address the current mismatch between skill strengths and 21st century job opportunities
- Practical HS education to train people in metal working, etc. doesn't really exist anymore
- Most educated youth are leaving area; greatest export in PA/NY is college graduates

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Changing demographics and a lack of preventive actions overburden existing health resources
- Need to create incentives to bring doctors/specialists to underserved rural communities
- Lack of affordable post-secondary education
- Need for education for 21st century jobs, starting in high school
- Insufficient access to credit in rural areas makes it difficult to start new businesses or launch new industries to create jobs

4. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Much of basic infrastructure is from the 1890's and is in horrible condition in this area
- Lack of broadband; low level access to public transit
- Private corporations externalizing infrastructure costs (public versus private costs)
- Federal government should allow agencies to piggy-back on infrastructure, so when you dig to install a water line, you also install broadband, telecommunications, etc.
- Railroads a key piece of physical infrastructure that is often forgotten

5. ECONOMIC BASE

- Use excess landmass for alternative energy production
- Study and invoke niche products
- Shift focus from mining to healthcare and tech (old economic activities to new)
- Recognition of the importance of traditional economic base – provide support for the expansion and modernization of this base. Specifically: agriculture, mining and forestry.
- The opportunity presented by the Marcellus Shale is currently critical to his region

6. OTHER/ENVIRONMENT

- Poverty and pollution are a bad image for promoting economic development – Appalachia carries bad connotation; hinders/discourages investment
- Urban bias with federal policies
- When government policies (local or fed) assume one size fits all, create unique challenges for rural communities
- Conduct system review of 12 agencies for duplication of efforts and grant process

LISTENING FORUM #2 – DECATUR, ALABAMA (AL, TN, GA, MS) 11 MARCH 2010

1. LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Communities lack true leadership. Need leadership training and education of existing leaders and elected officials, and effort must be made to attract and recruit new, aspiring leaders. The go-getters in the community are not stepping up. Need to offer youth training programs, and engage youth in “real” activities, like town meetings and planning sessions, to counter brain-drain.
- Need better planning and coordination between agencies, non-profits and community groups, and need better communication between local/state/federal leaders to share best practices and work more effectively.

2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Need to address the reality/perception that government doesn’t trust the citizens, citizens don’t trust the government.
- Federal programs should encourage local control, and they need to be more flexible and responsive to the local conditions. Grants should be linked to collaborative projects with partnerships required.

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Workforce training programs and business sector are not on the same page. The workforce is not prepared for jobs of the future.
- Financial sector is biased against small businesses and small loans, and need more micro-loan programs and incubators to grow new businesses.
- Educational attainment is low and drop-out rate is high. Need strategies that are more comprehensive, address family issues, teach basic life skills, and support post-HS education options for the non-college-going. Need to invest in distance learning for all high schools. Need to consolidate education system to be more effective.
- Lack of affordable health care and health personnel. Facilities are under funded and ERs are used for primary care.

4. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Water, sewer, and road systems are failing and there is insufficient funding to address deterioration; need alternatives to traditional approaches.
- Capacity of port and transportation system is not fully developed. Availability of broadband service is lacking. Don’t have publicly-controlled shovel-ready sites, so federal priorities don’t meet up with local needs. Storm water management is insufficient and flooding is chronic.

5. ECONOMIC BASE

- Overreliance on auto industry is not smart – need economic diversity. Small businesses need technical support, access to capital, incubators to create new industry. Conversely, older, existing businesses also need tools to innovate and grow. Invest in alternative energy, including R&D and skills training. Invest in tourism industry with more attractions and better marketing. Revitalize historic districts, and support cross-state partnerships.
- Agriculture sector is declining, farmers are aging and need to attract youth. Need to improve access to markets to sell locally-made products can be sold.

LISTENING SESSION #3 – MARION, NORTH CAROLINA (NC/SC/VA/TN) 16 MARCH 2010

1. LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Visionless, overwhelmed, entrenched, disjointed and ineffective leadership. Mandate training for leadership on importance of and techniques for planning and coordination strategies.
- Need better coordination between agencies and across city/county/state borders. Incentivize regional initiatives and publish successful regional efforts.
- Implement youth leadership and civics training in grade schools to get youth more involved in community
- Establish local advisory panels and blogs to ensure diverse interests at the table

2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Mismatch between jobs skills demand and training supplied
- Loosing educated youth while unable to attract doctors, teachers and trained workers
- Improve coordination and partnerships between employers, educators and workforce development agencies; tuition forgiveness for public service in areas of healthcare and education
- Drugs, crime and health issues

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Inflexible public policy and funding. Simplify application process for grants and loans; work with local academics to explore additional options for local government and business revenue generation
- Inadequate entrepreneurial support and inadequate understanding of entrepreneurialism
- Create free directory of business services to help streamline process for starting a business or doing business

4. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Access to broadband is limited and expensive to install in rural/mountainous areas. Access is paramount for education and workforce development training.
- Limited access in rural areas to water and sewer and inadequate planning for long-term operations and maintenance.
- Establish broader and more flexible funding allocations from state and federal sources to support sound local priorities.
- Incentivize redevelopment

4. ECONOMIC BASE

- Economy hurt by one industry domination and overreliance on coal. Investigate renewable economy potential and green jobs.
- Need to focus on integrated “sustainable” economic development that is “home grown”
- Promote green building and energy efficiency practices, services and products.
- Institute long-term program to retrain coal miners for other jobs as mining industry retracts

LISTENING FORUM #4 – PIPESTEM, WEST VIRGINIA (WV, VA, MD) 22 MARCH 2010

1. LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Local leadership lacks training on planning and capacity building
- Lack of communication between levels of government
- Bring more interests to the table and create a level playing field for planning

2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Limited skills for local jobs and high unemployment
- Gear workforce training towards local jobs and enhance workforce development
- Water pollution from coal mining and unsanitary sewers contaminates water supply, harms public health and deters economic development

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- High drop-out rates, lack of motivation and brain drain
- Culture undervalues education
- Reintroduce and emphasize “vo-tech” and alternative educational programs; strengthen community colleges
- Encourage entrepreneurialism through publically funded incubators and expand capital resources

4. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Inadequate and/or outdated water and sewer systems, roads and limited access to broadband
- Geographic isolation; poor access to local, national and global markets
- Need for clean water to all people in the state

5. ECONOMIC BASE

- Extractive and undiversified economy; declining number of jobs in manufacturing and mining; uncertainty in future of coal.
- Diversify economy into sustainable industries, tourism, value-added products and explore green jobs;
- Develop “local first” economy of products and small businesses for quality of life and economic well-being
- Invest in alternative energy research and development; increase education on forest industry

6. OTHER/ENVIRONMENT

- Public lacks education on the forest industry and its issues. Forest sustainability is a must for clean water, jobs and economic development, tourism and carbon storage.
- Problematic dependence on non-renewable resources; promote research and development for sustainable technologies to allow balance of the economy, environmental and social returns
- Promote energy conservation and green economy

LISTENING FORUM #5 – MOREHEAD, KENTUCKY (KY, OH) 14 APRIL 2010

1. LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

- Limited participation in leadership training opportunities for political/community leaders
- Develop a community strategic plan that embraces the community, region, and nation

2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Underutilized entrepreneurial and human capital development
- Polarization – the need to move from black/white - to common ground and cooperation
- Lack of local access to social/cultural opportunities
- Focus on entrepreneurs and expand capital resources
- Fund workforce upgrades and work replacement programs (non-college credit earnings)

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Lack of cooperation between local government agencies and community organizations
- Limited access to quality healthcare and wellness education
- Lack of substance abuse prevention and treatment programs
- Focus on K-12 education and outmigration of youth
- Incentivize regionalism – force everyone to table
- Develop a image rebranding initiative – branding Appalachia (“Mountain Proud”)
- Decriminalize drugs by enforcing alternative sentencing

4. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Need for sufficient transportation for available programs and services
- Lack of technical assistance and investment to support basic infrastructure - water, sewer, and roads
- Need to improve broadband/telecommunications services
- Improve housing for low-income people

5. ECONOMIC BASE

- Lack of promoting a long-term Appalachian transition away from coal to value added processing
- Need to create green jobs in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainability
- Broaden definition of economic development (tourism, small business)
- Need 20 to 30 year land use strategy
- Focus on growing small businesses and supporting them short and long-term