

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Appalachia

Building an Entrepreneurial Future: Ideas for Appalachia's Ecosystem Builders and Champions

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**APPALACHIAN
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COMMISSION**

EntreWorks Consulting with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
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About This Report

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This report, *Building an Entrepreneurial Future: Ideas for Appalachia's Ecosystem Builders and Champions*, was written by Erik R. Pages (EntreWorks Consulting), with support from Deborah Markley (Center for Rural Entrepreneurship), and the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness' Cathy Katona and Lindsay Johnson. We are grateful to our partners at the Appalachian Regional Commission and the many committed ecosystem builders around Appalachia who helped with this research, but more importantly are working to nurture Appalachia's entrepreneurs.

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For most of its recent history, a few major industries -- resource extraction (mainly coal and forestry), agriculture, and manufacturing – dominated Appalachia’s economy. The prosperity of Appalachian communities rose and fell with the fortunes of these sectors, and for many coal-dependent regions, the boom and bust cycles were quite severe. Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector suffered greatly from global competition, especially with imports from China and other low-cost countries. Over the past ten to twenty years, busts have dominated the booms, and most of the core sectors of the Appalachian economy have suffered from structural business and job loss along with community disinvestment and decline.

The Appalachian entrepreneur is largely missing from this economic narrative. Of course, entrepreneurs started the mines or opened new factories, but most of those investments were decades ago when coal became king; when textiles and furniture sought out cheap energy; and when tourists began seeking out Appalachian cultural assets and the Region’s natural beauty. Even so, the Region spawned few new scale-up businesses or technologies; it was not known as a place of innovation. Ideas that developed here tended to enrich people from far away. Wider global technology and economic forces and corporate decisions made elsewhere determined the economic circumstances of the Region and its early entrepreneurs.

Relatively higher levels of economic distress in Appalachia and the Region’s relatively weaker performance on various measures of economic dynamism and technology-led economic development reflect these legacies. For example, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, West Virginia consistently ranked as the weakest national performer in the annual Kauffman Foundation Index of Entrepreneurial Activity.¹ Other states within the Appalachian Region, including Ohio and Pennsylvania, also performed poorly. Similarly, the 2010 State New Economy Index ranked five ARC region states in the bottom ten in its assessment of state capacity to support innovation and technology-led development.²

However, in recent years, the Region’s performance on key measures of innovation and entrepreneurship has improved. In the 2017 edition of the State New Economy Index, Tennessee showed the greatest improvement in relative performance, and several other ARC states (Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Virginia) also saw big jumps in their rankings.³ The Kauffman Index finds that

¹ Robert W. Fairlie, Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity, 1996-2012. Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, April 2013. The research also found that many states within the Appalachian region, such as Georgia and South Carolina, were among the nation’s top performers.

² Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, *The 2010 State New Economy Index: Benchmarking Transformation in the States*. Available at: <http://www.kauffman.org/what-we-do/research/2010/11/2010-state-new-economy-index>.

³ Robert D. Atkinson and J. John Wu, *The 2017 State New Economy Index: Benchmarking Transformation in the States*. Information Technology and Innovation Foundation Report available at: <http://www2.itif.org/2017-state-new-economy-index.pdf>.

Appalachian states perform extremely well in terms of growth companies, although performance in measures of new startups and Main Street businesses is less promising.⁴

The Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Appalachia Project

Data from the Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Appalachia project also suggest an optimistic take on Appalachia's economic prospects. These data compare the performance of every county in the Appalachian Region on many measures to national, state, and regional averages. The data are available at the Appalachian Entrepreneurial Dynamism Dashboard at <http://arceco.creconline.org/dash/>. The Dashboard tracks county economic performance on several fronts:

- What does the local business base look like?
 - Share of Startup Establishments
 - Share of High Growth Companies
 - Share of Stage 2 Companies (i.e., those with 10-99 employees)
- How are local firms performing?
 - Growth in the number of establishments, 2010 to 2015
 - Growth in jobs, 2010-2015
 - Growth in sales, 2010-2015

As Figure 1 shows, county performance on these measures varies greatly. Yet, in general, there are few sizable differences between the overall performance of the Appalachian Region and national averages. In reviewing the data, researchers found a higher concentration of entrepreneurial activity in metropolitan centers within and near the Appalachian Region, and also in communities with research universities. In states that include both ARC and non-ARC counties, counties within the ARC service area show similar performance to statewide averages after controlling for the location of metro areas and university centers.

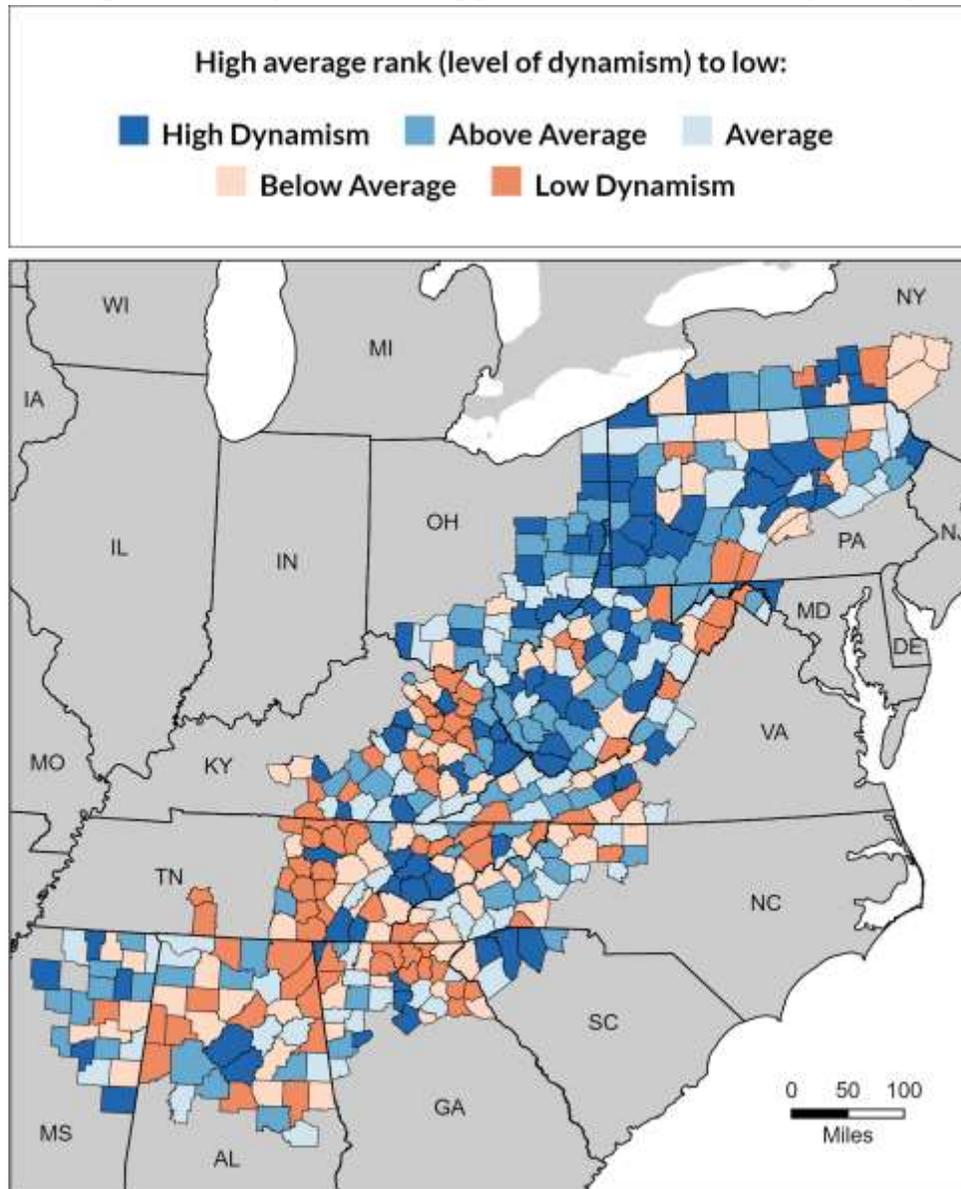
This mixed performance makes it difficult to speak of common entrepreneurial dynamism trends across Appalachia. There is significant variation in performance across and within states. For example, in Ohio, the Appalachian counties are strong performers when compared to national and Appalachian Region averages. However, they underperform in comparison to non-Appalachian counties in Ohio. Most other states show a similar mix in outcomes. However, West Virginia consistently lags behind other states on all of these measures.

Digging deeper into the various sub-measures also yields some interesting insights. At the broadest level, entrepreneurial dynamism levels appear to be low and/or below average in parts of Central and Southern Appalachia (eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, Alabama, and north Georgia). In the case of

⁴ Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, *The Kauffman Index: Entrepreneurship Series*. Available at: <http://www.kauffman.org/kauffman-index>

Central Appalachia, this subregion also shows some of the highest levels of economic distress in the Region.⁵

Figure 1: Entrepreneurial Dynamism in Appalachia: Performance by County, 2011-2015

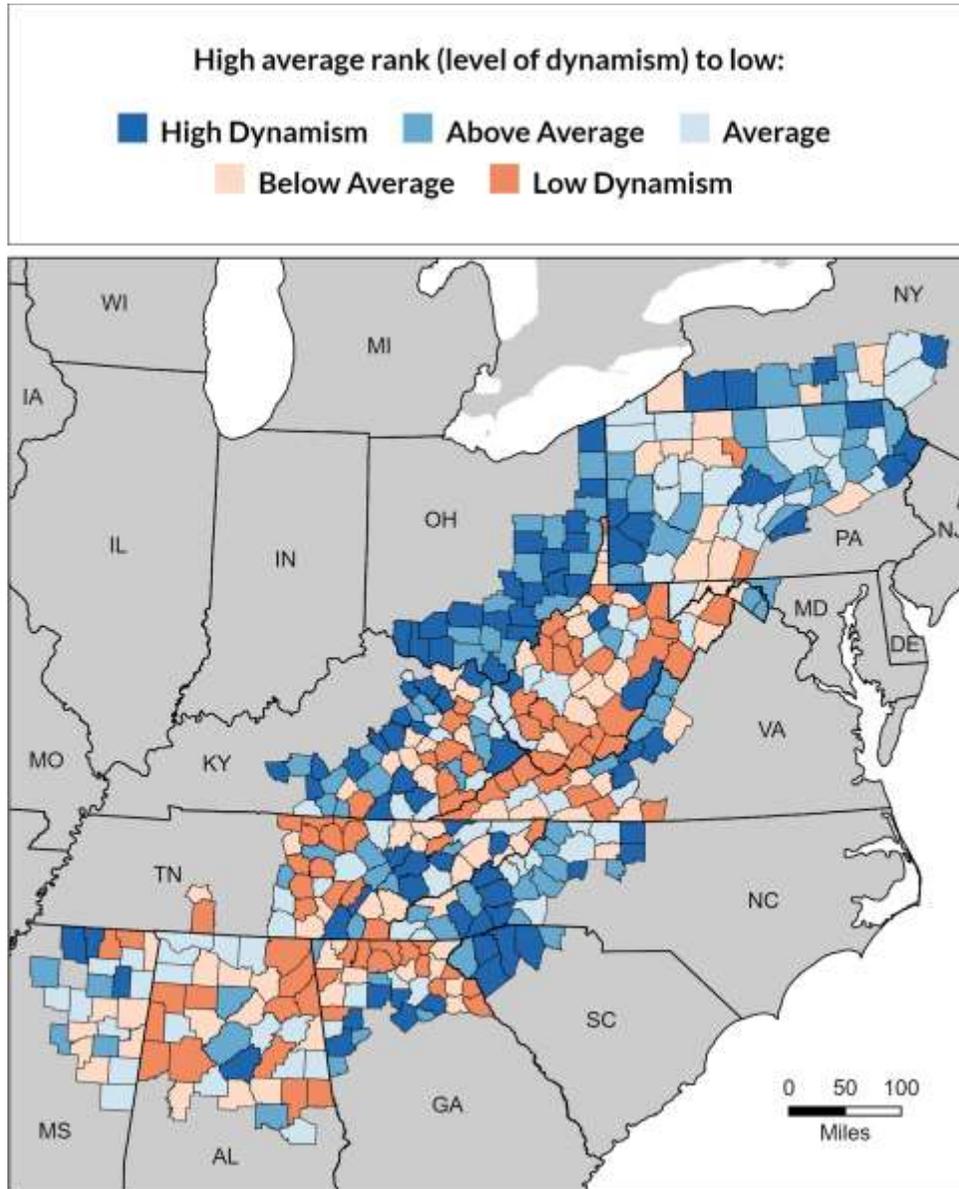


The share of startups and the growth of new establishments often serve as markers of a location's economic dynamism, as economic growth generates new opportunities for new businesses. Across Appalachia, startup concentrations fall slightly below U.S. averages. In Appalachia as a whole, startup establishments made up 26.3 percent of all firms in 2015. In the U.S., startups comprised 30.7 percent

⁵ See County Economic Status and Distressed Areas in Appalachia at https://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/CountyEconomicStatusandDistressedAreasinAppalachia.asp.

of all establishments in the same year. The Appalachian Region outperformed the U.S. average in terms of the growth in the number of establishments between 2010 and 2015 (see Figure 2). In Appalachia, new establishments jumped by 6.1 percent between 2010 and 2015. Across the U.S., this figure was 5.8 percent.

Figure 2: New Establishment Growth in Appalachia, By County: 2011-2015

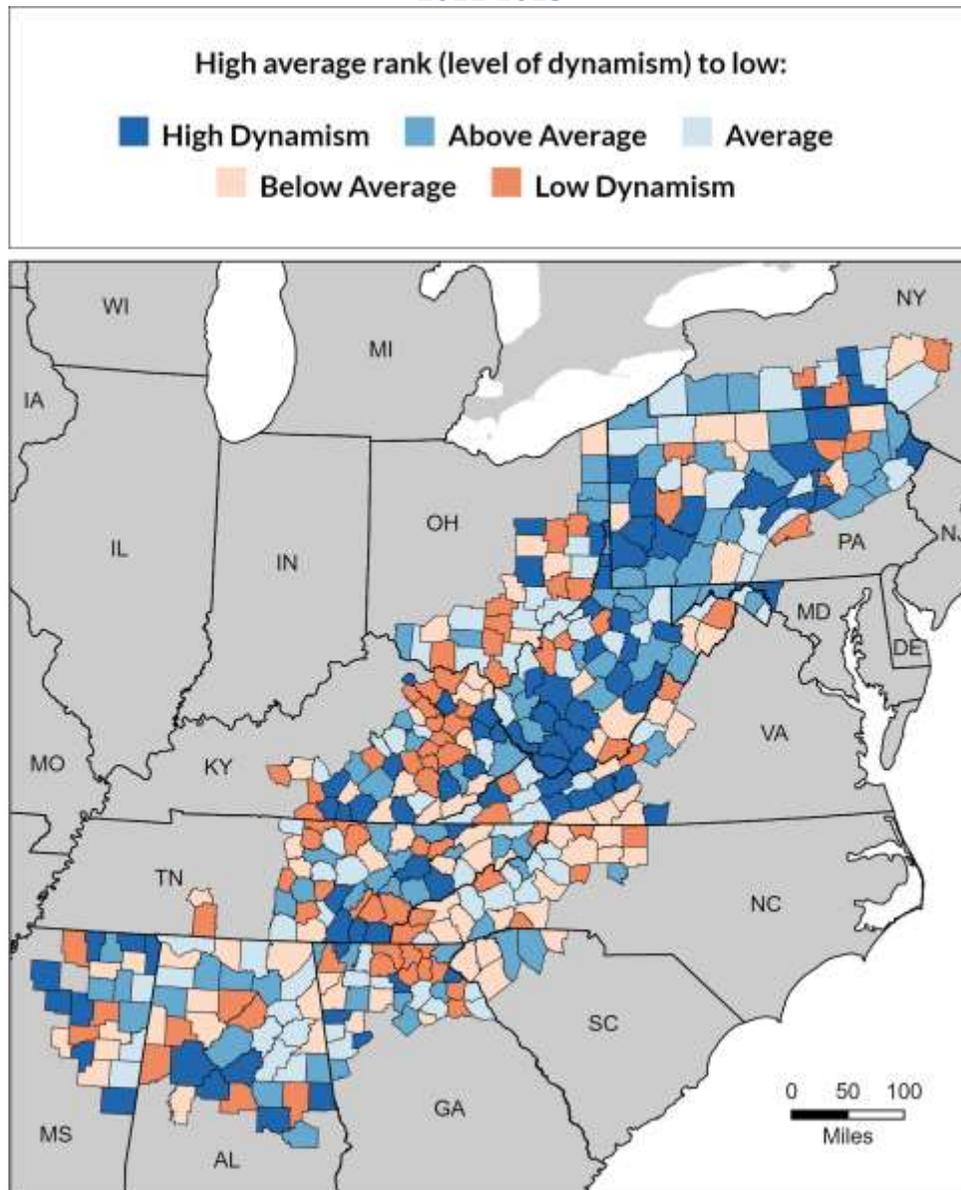


Startup establishment concentrations vary greatly by county. Lower startup shares and new establishment growth rates are concentrated in central and southern Appalachia. Stronger performances can be found in the Appalachian portions of Ohio, South Carolina, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and New York. Several of these locations, including counties in New York, North Carolina, and Ohio, are the subject of deep dive case studies as part of the larger Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in

Appalachia Project. These reports can be found online at arc.gov, as well as the project website at <http://arceco.creconline.org>.

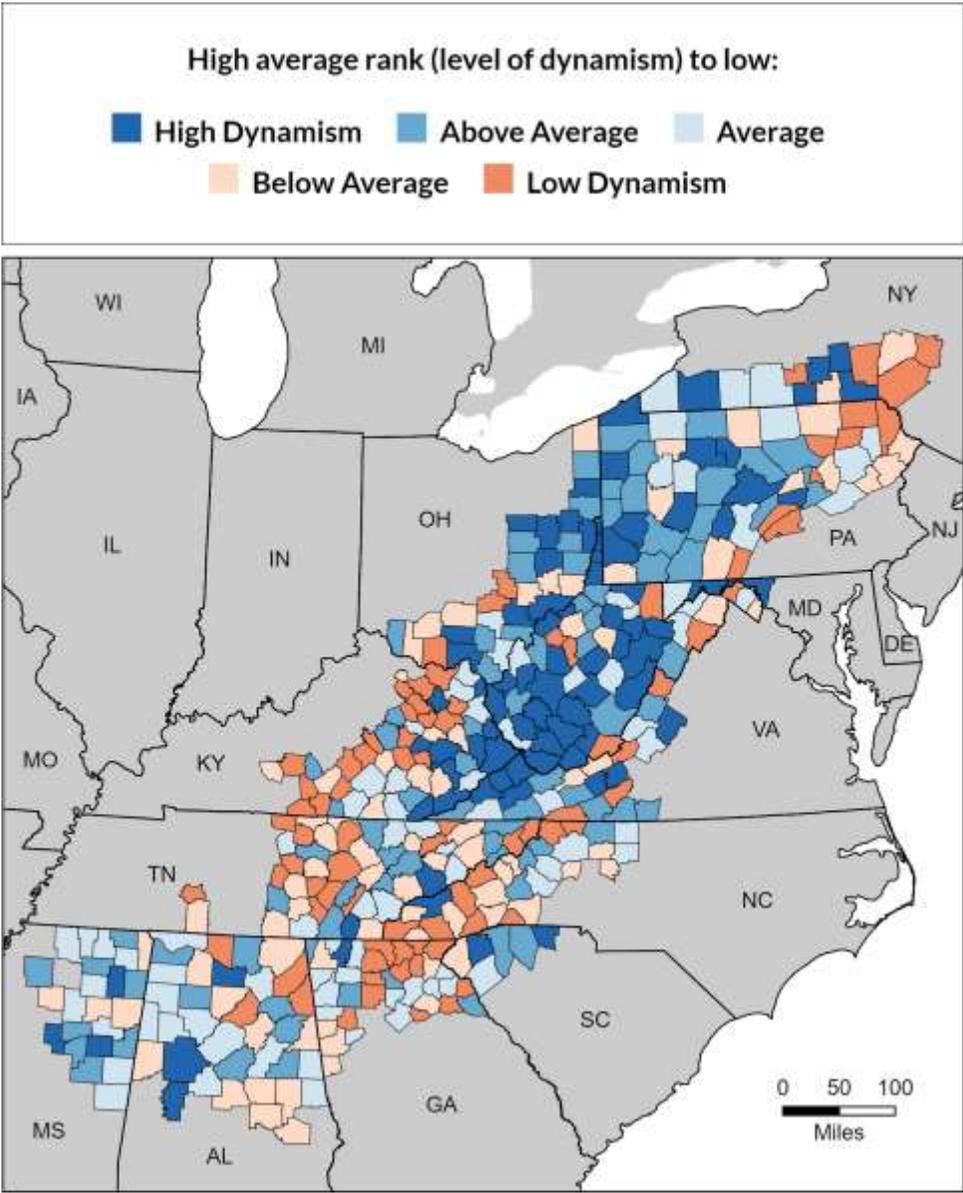
Successful ecosystems help spawn new startup companies, and though these companies are essential to the entrepreneurial health of any particular area, high growth ventures tend to be the real drivers of new job and wealth creation. As such, Appalachia's overall performance in terms of high-growth establishments is promising (see Figure 3). Our data show that between 2010 and 2015, Appalachia's share of high-growth companies (1.7%) is slightly higher than the national average (1.5%). Sales and job growth data also suggest few differences in performance between Appalachia and the U.S. over this time frame.

Figure 3: Growth in the Number of High Growth Establishments in Appalachia, By County: 2011-2015



Across counties, local performance in terms of high-growth companies varies greatly and few common patterns emerge (see Figure 3). Several locations in Mississippi, Alabama, and Pennsylvania show higher levels of high-growth companies. The strong performance of counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia may be the result of shale gas development in those locations.

Figure 4: Growth in the Number of Stage 2 Establishments in Appalachia, By County: 2011-2015



The share of Stage 2 establishments, those employing between 10-99 people, varies little between Appalachia (15.3%) and the U.S. (15.6%). Some analysts suggest that higher shares of Stage 2 companies are a potential sign of local business growth opportunities. However, Stage 2 firms are typically older as well, as these figures may simply indicate the presence of older companies in a local

economy (see Figure 4). These factors may explain the relatively high concentrations of Stage 2 companies found in Central Appalachian counties that underperformed on the other measures of economic dynamism. Further research that assesses the age of local establishments is needed to better understand these development patterns.

This analysis offers a single snapshot in time, using only one source of data on business establishment performance. While we caution against broad generalizations, the research suggests some cause for optimism about the economic prospects for much of Appalachia. Appalachia's improved economic performance has many causes. Like other parts of the United States, Appalachia is benefitting from overall economic growth and the broader recovery underway since the Great Recession. It is also possible that the Region's shifting economic development strategies are playing a role, as states and localities invested more in ecosystem development during the past decade. These investments appear to be paying dividends in terms of new and growing businesses, new jobs, and greater buzz about Appalachia's entrepreneurial potential.

ARC's own investments to build regional and local ecosystems date back to the 1990s with the first Entrepreneurship Initiative, which operated from 1997 to 2005. During this period, ARC and its partners invested \$43 million in a wide range of projects that help put entrepreneurship "on the map" in Appalachia. These investments helped spur the creation of 12,000 jobs and 1,700 new businesses.⁶ Many of the programs highlighted in the project case studies got their start during this period, or received critical early stage investments that helped solidify local ecosystem building efforts. Specific examples include the Shoals Entrepreneur Center, Ohio's ACENet and the Ohio University Innovation Center, North Carolina's Mountain BizWorks, the Garrett County (MD) Information Enterprise Center, and various community development programs operating in Southwest Virginia. Thanks to technical assistance, network building support, and seed funding from ARC and other sources, these emerging organizations and their partners have catalyzed the long-term process of transforming Appalachia's economy. States in the Region have also reinforced ARC and local efforts. Projects like Maryland's TEDCO, Georgia's Entrepreneur-Friendly Communities program, and the North Carolina Rural Center's Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship also spread the message that entrepreneurship promotion and ecosystem building were essential to economic transformations.

The Current Challenge

When ARC began its original Entrepreneurship Initiative in the 1990s, it was in many ways the only game in town. Few other federal agencies were making similar investments and local entrepreneurship advocates were rare at the community level. Programs were emerging in large cities and technology hot spots, but most subregions throughout Appalachia did not view entrepreneurship as a core part of community building, economic development, or placemaking efforts.

⁶ For background, see Deborah Markley et al. *Creating an Entrepreneurial Appalachian Region*, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship Report, April 2008, pp. 1-2. Available at: https://www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/creatinganentrepreneurialappalachia.pdf

Today, this market environment is completely transformed. The Region’s economic development portfolio now includes entrepreneurship at its core and entrepreneurs are taking on a more visible leadership role in Appalachia’s ongoing economic transition. At the national level, federal agencies are engaged, and major national efforts, such as the Kauffman Foundation’s Ecosystem Building Community and private efforts such as the “Rise of the Rest” initiative, invest in entrepreneurs and regional ecosystem champions.

Faced with this new and inviting marketplace, ARC and its partners no longer need to focus on putting entrepreneurship “on the map.” Instead, future investments can focus on sustaining progress in promising subregions and programs, building closer connections within the regional ecosystem, targeting investments to distressed regions, and ensuring that all parts of Appalachia share in the benefits of this ongoing economic transformation.

Below, we present initial ideas for how ARC and its state and local partners can best sustain the ongoing entrepreneurial transformation of Appalachia. As noted in the other *Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Appalachia* materials, effective ecosystem building engages multiple stakeholders and partners. No one organization “owns” the ecosystem. Instead, entrepreneurs are forming networks, supported by public, nonprofit, and private organizations to build and sustain a robust and effective regional ecosystem. What’s true at the local level is true for all of Appalachia. Building an entrepreneurial future will require new directions from ARC, its state and local partners, and Appalachia’s entrepreneurs as well. Some proposed new directions are presented below.

Ideas for the Appalachian Regional Commission

The Commission should continue its ongoing efforts to both promote entrepreneurship as a core economic development strategy and to invest in local ecosystem building initiatives. These objectives are a core component of ARC’s current strategic plan which lists “Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia’s economy” as Investment Goal #1 for its 2016-2020 focus areas.⁷ Unlike the early stages of ARC’s entrepreneurship work, however, the Region has a much broader group of stakeholders committed to building a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem. There are more partners in the public, private and philanthropic sectors investing in entrepreneurial development. While ARC’s efforts should continue, they must also evolve to recognize this more developed landscape and identify the best cross-regional leadership and investment roles for the Commission.

Beyond continued high-level support for entrepreneurial development across Appalachia, the Commission should consider several other potential policy directions.

- **Support an Appalachian Ecosystem Builder Network**

For years, ARC has consciously sought to build connections within and across Appalachia so that local leaders can share ideas and learn from one another. A number of network and region-wide projects

⁷ Strategic Plan p.9

have resulted. Examples include the Network Appalachia group that focuses on transportation issues and the ARC Export Trade Advisory Council, which has been in operation since 1995. Similarly, the Bon Appetit Appalachia project helps to market and promote the Region's unique food assets. In the entrepreneurship area, the Commission has helped build strong regional and global networks focused on angel investing via the Appalachian Angel Investor Alliance and entrepreneurship education via the America's Entrepreneurial Schools Initiative.

The Commission should consider supporting a similar network for ecosystem builders. This effort could be formally chartered or simply rely on regular meetings or an annual summit to share ideas and lessons learned. It could also link (formally or informally) to other ongoing community building efforts such as the work of Global Entrepreneurship Week USA or the Kauffman Foundation ecosystem building efforts. The network will be especially helpful for partners working in distressed regions, where they can benefit from links and knowledge sharing from more developed regional ecosystems.

While the network's specific structure and functions are still to be determined, it should primarily focus on supporting all ecosystem builders across Appalachia. This wide lens focus will require outreach and engagement with new partners that may have not been past ARC grantees or stakeholders. As noted in our case studies and other research, new specialized community organizations are often leading ecosystem building work. These organizations often focus solely on ecosystem development. Groups like LAUNCH Chattanooga or Huntsville's Rocket Hatch operate as independent non-profits. They are bringing fresh ideas and approaches to local ecosystem development. These new organizations would benefit from connections to traditional ARC partners and stakeholders, and at the same time, they can bring new energy and fresh ideas to these core ARC partners.

- **Champion Appalachian Entrepreneurs**

Successful communities champion their entrepreneurs. Our case studies revealed that forward-thinking community leaders consciously seek out ways to promote entrepreneurship as a career option and to recognize local people who have succeeded in starting or growing new ventures. ARC could assume a larger role as this champion for the wider Appalachian Region. Beyond simply promoting the Region's entrepreneurs in ARC reports and materials, the Commission might consider annual awards programs to recognize the best businesses and ecosystem champions. Such programs have succeeded in the past as ARC developed a popular entrepreneurship education awards program in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Other activities might occur under the auspices of the ecosystem builder network described above. Examples might include training programs, peer networks, or state-level meetings that bring together ecosystem builders from across a state or subregion.

- **Target Ecosystem Gaps**

As more subregions gain traction in building the framework for local ecosystems, the Commission's investments can transition away from making the case for ecosystem building to targeting gaps in these regional networks. Specific target areas may vary, but the Commission and its partners may consider Region-wide programs that focus on common areas of concern or under-investment. For example, the

Commission has invested for several years to improve capital access for businesses in the Region. Specific projects include the work of Appalachian Community Capital to link Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) lenders across Appalachia, and partnerships with the Appalachian Funders Network to encourage investment in emerging sectors such as food systems, health and energy. Future areas for focus might include youth entrepreneurship or business scale-up programs, both of which are areas where ecosystem gaps are common across Appalachia. These ideas are also discussed below in recommendations for regional and local partners.

- **Link Ecosystem Building to other Commission Priorities**

Our research also found that successful places often link ecosystem building to other community development or placemaking strategies. For example, food systems development is a core part of ecosystem building in Athens, Ohio and Alabama’s Shoals region. In Southwest Virginia, tourism promotion and ecosystem building go hand in hand. Links to downtown development, in communities such as Abingdon, Marion, and St. Paul, have also been closely aligned to entrepreneur support efforts in Virginia. Building stronger communities across Appalachia will require investments that go beyond economic development and include more holistic strategies that focus on strengthening community leadership capacity, attracting and retaining younger residents and entrepreneurs, developing natural and other amenities needed to ensure quality of place, and engaging a broad set of partners to advance a common vision for community prosperity. Commission staff and leadership should use investments in entrepreneurship strategies as a tool to leverage this broader, “system focused” strategic development among its state, regional and local partners.

These connections spurred by the Commission also help open other investment opportunities for ecosystem builders. Philanthropic investments are and should remain as important resources. Group such as the Appalachian Funders Network are bringing in numerous outside investors to support sectoral strategies, which include entrepreneur support in areas such as food systems, health, and energy.

Ideas for State Partners

States are political entities; they are not natural economic units. Thus, it is rare to speak of a state entrepreneurial ecosystem. Ecosystem building typically occurs at the regional level, and successful regional ecosystems often cross state lines. State leaders should recognize that they do not need to create or recreate ecosystems at the state level. But, they can and should work to nurture regional ecosystems and to connect them with one another. This work could include some of the following ideas:

- **Fund and Promote State/Regional Gateways**

A number of states have invested in web portals or online clearinghouses that compile listings of support programs or provide advice or troubleshooting support to residents seeking help with business

questions. Examples include Business Link North Carolina, Kentucky’s One Stop Business Portal or Pennsylvania’s new PA Business One-Stop Shop. These websites and support desks are relatively easy to set up and operate, and they should be a core part of any state’s basic customer service programs. Ideally, these sites should also connect people to local or regional ecosystems where they can become more closely engaged in peer networks and other support services.

- **Link State Programs to Regional Ecosystems**

States can also improve their outreach and linkages to regional ecosystem builders. Many states do this already through efforts such as Pennsylvania’s Partnerships for Regional Economic Prosperity (PREP) networks or North Carolina’s statewide Business Resource Alliance. These existing groups typically serve as peer networks of staff/leaders from government-backed business service providers, such as Small Business Development Centers, Cooperative Extension, or Manufacturing Extension Partnership offices. These existing networks could be further strengthened by engaging new types of ecosystem building organizations to supplement the current publicly funded network participants.

States could also embrace a more active role by seeding regional networks (PA PREP) or by investing in regional networks of entrepreneur centers. This latter strategy has been adopted by LaunchTN which, among other things, manages a statewide network of six entrepreneur centers. Via TEDCO, the state of Maryland has also invested in the creation of a statewide network of incubator facilities. Another option would be to invest in “circuit riders” or regional representatives who provide additional support to local or regional ecosystem builders. This support could be as simple as providing regularly scheduled office hours at an entrepreneurial hub organization so that local partners have easier access to state organizations. Finally, states should embrace a more expansive role in tracking the entrepreneurial economy by developing and sharing new data on startups and small business performance.

- **Support Regulatory Review**

States can also help nurture local ecosystems by ensuring that state rules and regulations are as “entrepreneur friendly” as possible. This step involves regular review of existing rules and regulations and outreach to business owners and others to identify potential problem areas. Some states, such as Maryland and West Virginia, have opted to create ombudsman offices to help oversee this review process.

- **Build Youth Entrepreneurship Capacities**

State and regional ecosystems vary in their strengths and gaps; however, one clear pattern did emerge across nearly all Appalachian subregions. With a few exceptions, most states and subregions lack dedicated programming and resources to promote youth entrepreneurship. Given the importance of an “entrepreneur-friendly culture” to successful ecosystems, this gap poses serious challenges. States and localities should more actively embrace youth entrepreneurship, by encouraging the inclusion of entrepreneurship into formal education curricula, infusing entrepreneurship into workforce and other training programs, and creating new opportunities, such as summer camp programs, for young people

to learn about entrepreneurship as a career option. Community college programs, such as the Commission-backed America’s Entrepreneurial Schools Initiative, can also be tapped to support this work.

Ideas for Regional and Local Partners

Ecosystems operate at the regional and local level, so the work of regional and local officials is the most important factor in successful ecosystem building. Local leaders can now tap into a large and growing literature on what works in ecosystem building as well as new national and global networks that support ecosystem builders. The Kauffman Foundation has developed “Seven Design Principles for Building Entrepreneurial Ecosystems” that provide excellent guidance for local and regional entrepreneurship advocates:⁸

- 1) Put Entrepreneurs Front and Center: Effective ecosystems are led “by and for” entrepreneurs.
- 2) Foster Conversations: Effective ecosystems engage multiple partners in conversations that are focused on hope and action.
- 3) Enlist Collaborators. Everyone is invited: Effective ecosystems engage partners from all walks of life, multiple disciplines, and multiple sectors.
- 4) Live the Values: Effective ecosystems do not have a “leader.” They are built on an invisible social contract of shared values.
- 5) Connect people bottom-up, top-down, outside-in: Effective ecosystems bridge social boundaries and build tribes of trust.
- 6) Tell a Community’s Authentic Story: Effective ecosystems champion role models and create stories out of strength.
- 7) Start, be patient: Effective ecosystems take time to build.

Beyond embracing and operating according to these compelling principles, Appalachia’s local ecosystem builders should consider the following ideas:

- **Think Bigger**

Successful regions think and act like regions when it comes to building entrepreneurial ecosystems. Several of our case studies focus on county-level ecosystem building efforts, but our findings suggest that most parts of Appalachia need to think bigger in terms of regional partners and service areas. Working at a wider regional level can engage more entrepreneurs and increase the density of networks. Such strategies also allow business service providers to share resources and ideas, and more effectively and efficiently support local companies. Working at the regional level also enables entrepreneurs to more effectively tap external markets. ACEnet’s work with food sector entrepreneurs across the broader Appalachian Ohio region was accelerated by building a regional brand – Food We Love – and then

⁸ Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building Playbook (Version 1.0) (2017) is available at: <https://www.kauffman.org/entrepreneurial-ecosystem-building-playbook/introduction>.

tapping markets in metro areas outside this region. Efforts by the Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth (APEG) are targeting wood products entrepreneurs in a similar regional footprint.

In addition to expanding the geographic scope of ecosystems and related programs, local leaders should also consider developing partnerships beyond their regions. These could take the form of industry-focused networks (e.g., trade associations), where local firms in a given sector, such as food systems or information technology, can network and connect with national or global partners operating in the same industry. Other opportunities could be based on developing formal partnerships or even new forms of sister city relationships. For example, the International Business Innovation Association (InBIA) operates a “soft landings” program that links US-based incubators with overseas partners for the shared purpose of attracting new clients and new foreign investments.⁹ These global ties can be particularly important in terms of accessing new and different sources of capital to serve the Region’s entrepreneurs.

- **Target Ecosystem Gaps**

While each region’s ecosystem strengths and weaknesses will vary, two prominent gaps are common. First, many regions could do a better job of promoting youth entrepreneurship and providing opportunities for young people to learn about entrepreneurship as a career option. Second, more regions should embrace new programs that help companies scale-up, or move from the startup phase to high-growth phase.

A number of places throughout Appalachian have developed effective scaleup programs. For example, Mountain BizWorks in western North Carolina is continuing to build on the SBA-supported ScaleUp WNC effort launched in 2015. Six cohorts of 15-16 growth-oriented companies have gone through the intensive effort, receiving mentorship, management assistance, and connections to growth capital. Other efforts like One Million Cups and Startup Weekend are also gaining traction around the Region. These scaleup efforts will also benefit from new programs to bring new sources of equity capital to the Region’s emerging ecosystems. A number of promising efforts have been established, but capital access gaps still exist in much of Appalachia.¹⁰ Continued efforts to enhance local capital access, via continued support for regional angel funds, crowdfunding and other similar steps, will also help on this front. The Appalachian Regional Commission has supported a number of important initiatives to spur local angel investments via the ARC Capital Policy Initiative. This project provides funding and technical assistance, and has helped seed the creation of six new angel funds that have raised more than \$8 million to invest in promising local ventures.

Ideas for Appalachia’s Entrepreneurs

As noted above, strong and successful ecosystems are “by and for” entrepreneurs where entrepreneurs lead local efforts and design initiatives that address their most pressing needs and issues. Further

⁹ <https://inbia.org/global-programs/soft-landings/>

¹⁰ For background see https://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=104

development of Appalachia’s ecosystems will not happen without the time, commitment, and resources of the region’s entrepreneurs. How can they help?

- **Start and Engage**

If you are an entrepreneur based in Appalachia, find and tap into local, regional or statewide ecosystem services and networks. (You can find an inventory of resources at the accompanying Appalachian Entrepreneurial Resources Inventory at <http://arceco.creconline.org/inventory/>). If you find a local network, please get involved. If you cannot find local resources, create them yourself. The Resources Inventory and our related project materials offer lots of ideas on what works and what doesn’t, but the most important thing is to just get started.

- **Speak Up and Participate**

Local elected officials and community leaders want to help, but they often do not know where to start. That’s where you come in! Share your experiences with community leaders, provide feedback on what resources are valuable and what are not. Most local leaders want to help and value the contributions and insights of entrepreneurs. Local leaders are much more willing to support local partners in the ecosystem if they know these networks operate by and for entrepreneurs, but those local partners cannot succeed without entrepreneurs willing to speak out, participate, and lead.

- **Give Back**

There are many ways to give back to the community and the ecosystem, such as:

- Serve as a mentor
- Host a networking event at your business
- Make a charitable donation to support entrepreneurial efforts
- Coach young entrepreneurs
- Invest in a startup or growing entrepreneur