



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Appalachia Funders Network: Making a Collective Impact in Central Appalachia

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Mary Hunt is the Senior Program Officer for the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation based in Pittsburgh, serving all of West Virginia and four counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. In her program focus areas of community and economic development, Mary works with nonprofits, local, state and federal governments as well as educational institutions.

Prior to joining the Benedum Foundation, she held community development and administrative management positions at the local and state government levels and a private corporation in West Virginia. She holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a master's degree in Public Administration. Mary's work at the foundation focuses on rural and technology-based economic development, entrepreneurship, community capacity building and civic engagement. She serves on several advisory councils and boards which advance the efforts supported by the foundation.

Central Appalachia, a region defined as Appalachian counties in six states: West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina, is in the midst of a major economic transition. This transition creates an absolute imperative to maximize every opportunity to provide for the growth of healthy, diverse and thriving communities. This was the inducement for philanthropic and public funders from within and outside the region to come together and create new collaborations to accelerate a more positive economic transition in the region.

The result was the formation of the Appalachia Funders Network in 2009, to engage funders who recognize that collaboration can produce more impactful grants and investments, which result in greater economic prosperity and positive social change. The network involves more than 80 private and public funders in learning, analysis and collective grant making, resulting in new investments in sound economic strategies.

## Appalachia Funders NETWORK

learning · analysis · collaboration

Located squarely in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, the region shares common assets: scenic landscapes, waterways, farmland, natural resources and innovative people with a strong sense of place. The network directs its efforts to those on-the-ground and policy-level efforts that erase the lines of real and perceived boundaries to create new opportunities by building upon the region's strengths.

The network identifies entrepreneurship as a foundation for future prosperity. New ventures create new wealth, much of which is reinvested back into communities. Entrepreneurship in Central Appalachia includes ventures in agriculture and food systems, where there is





proven opportunity to create new jobs while providing better access to fresh, healthful food. Healthcare presents a significant opportunity for new ventures in an essential sector, one that also creates good jobs. And, the network recognizes that energy production and efficiency present challenges and opportunities that require innovative strategies to take the region into the future.

The scale of the opportunity is great and requires larger and more informed investments that reach the entire region. Therefore, attracting and leveraging resources from philanthropies both inside and outside the region is key to the network's efforts. Recently, the network led the formation of a funding pool which provided support to local public, academic and nonprofit organizations for the development of strong applications for federal funding to advance economic development in the region. The effort is expected to produce new financial

resources and beneficial partnerships aimed at growing the region's economy.

The Appalachia Funders Network intends to continue to pursue those activities that have a positive collective impact on Central Appalachia as the region's economic, social, and cultural transition evolves. ▾

Please visit [www.appalachiafunders.org](http://www.appalachiafunders.org) to find out more about the network.

*The Appalachia Funders Network hosted various regional gatherings to focus on topics that impact local communities:*

1) Jason Walsh, Senior Policy Advisor, Executive Office of the President, spoke about the role philanthropy plays in strengthening community capacity and the Federal POWER+ Initiative, which provides support to coal-impacted communities

*Photo Credit: Appalachia Funders Network*

2) Members of the Steering Committee (L-R): Terri Donlin Huesman (Osteopathic Heritage Foundations), Ray Daffner (Appalachian Regional Commission), Marlo Long (BB&T Bank), Susan Urano (Athens Foundation), Gerry Roll (Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky), Joe Woody (USDA-RD Tennessee), Lora Smith (Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation) and Margo Miller (Appalachian Community Fund) Not Pictured: Mary Hunt (The Benedum Foundation)

*Photo Credit: Appalachia Funders Network*

3) From left, Cynthia Drennan (Sisters Health Foundation), Susan Zepeda (Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky) and Lori Glass (Appalachian Community Capital) participated in an Appalachia Funders Network meeting focused on healthcare opportunities

*Photo Credit: Kevin Manuel, Ohio University*

4) In April 2015, more than 150 national, regional, and local funders, financial institutions, government agencies and economic development practitioners gathered in Kingsport, Tennessee, for the sixth annual Gathering of the Appalachia Funders Network

*Photo Credit: Appalachia Funders Network*