Blueprint.

A Plan for Our Future

Let's get to work.

Blueprint.

A Plan for Our Future

executive SUMMARY

This Blueprint is built off of content from the original 10 Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) working group reports that were developed in 2014. The reports were developed from community members' input during listening sessions held across 54 Appalachian counties in the Eastern Kentucky region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).[1] This Blueprint is an effort to more strategically organize those 10 reports, each with a different focus area, into a cohesive document with strategic goals and objectives. It is based upon continued feedback from the region via round-table sessions, the SOAR Advisory Council, SOAR Executive Board Members, and analysis by SOAR staff. The end goal is that this Blueprint will be used to coordinate a well-organized, strategic, proactive, and systemic approach across federal, state, local, and non-profit agencies to accomplish the greatest economic turn-around in the history of the United States of America. To achieve this historic movement, SOAR has developed seven overarching goals to spur economic growth in Eastern Kentucky. These goals, along with the corresponding objectives, have been approved by the SOAR Executive Board.

1 To read the working group reports please visit: http://bit.ly/2e3yY9O

To achieve outcomes that have never been realized, we must do things that have never been done.

SOAR's Blueprint for the Future of Appalachia is a plan that outlines seven goals that will drive the transformation of Appalachia Kentucky. The first goal is connectivity, and the other six goals are what we plan to do with it to transform the region. The Blueprint was created through the input of thousands of people across the region.

PAGE 12	**BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY**	Increase the availability of affordable high-speed broadband, through fiber, to businesses and residents; and increase adoption rates throughout the SOAR region
PAGE 13	**21ST CENTURY WORKFORCE**	Develop our regional workforce to be competitive in the digital economy and other emerging industries
PAGE 14	**SMALL BUSINESS**	To create more and expand existing small businesses within the region by taking full advantage of the digital economy
PAGE 15	**HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**	To reduce the physical and economic impact of obesity, diabetes, and substance use disorder
PAGE 16	**INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT**	Increase the amount of industrial employment which includes manufacturing, natural resources, processing, and distribution by expanding existing companies and attracting new ones
PAGE 17	**REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS**	Create a local foods movement by connecting local producers to markets for their products both within and outside the region
PAGE 18	**REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**	Establish Kentucky's Appalachian region as a tourism destination

strategic IMPLEMENTATION

CONVENINGS

SOAR leverages its network of partners to host, co-host, and sponsor a variety of convenings ranging from community planning sessions, networking events for small businesses, startups, and entrepreneurs, and regional and cross-sector workshops and training sessions. The largest annual convening is the SOAR Summit. The two-day event attracts more than 1,300 people and is home to more than 90 exhibits aligned with the Blueprint for the Future of Appalachia.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication is a key element to SOAR's Program of Work. SOAR's communication channels are vast, including e-mail, social media, websites, and other media outlets (radio, television, billboards, and digital). SOAR has established a media partnership program that includes WYMT, Fairway Outdoor, WDOC, Inc., and the Forcht Group of Kentucky. It also created the There is a Future website (www.thereisafuture.org) in 2018 as a way to shape a new narrative of Appalachia Kentucky and highlight and celebrate the many stories of transformation aligned with its Blueprint. Through a collaboration with PIKE TV, SOAR produces a series of in-depth videos throughout the year that highlights stories of transformation and cross-sector collaborations happening across the region. SOAR's communication platforms reach more than 1.5 million people annually.

CONSULTATIONS

SOAR's experience in building cross-sector collaborations, driving innovation, and leveraging technology to disrupt poverty has allowed the organization to lead and be a part of many transformative efforts across Appalachia Kentucky. Through SOAR Innovation, more than 200 small businesses, startups, and entrepreneurs are receiving services ranging from technical assistance, marketing, website, and finance. SOAR is a leading partner in other projects such as Digital Careers Now, a program aimed to provide accelerated, industry-driven training with an emphasis on remote work opportunity, and has served as a supporter for AppHarvest, a high-tech agriculture startup that is building a more than 2.5 million-square-foot greenhouse in Morehead, KY.

the task AT HAND

Employing 30,000+ People

In recent history, coal has been the lifeblood of Eastern Kentucky's economy, yet in 2009 that changed. From 2008 to the 3rd quarter of 2019, the region shed 11,787 coal mining jobs, a decrease of 79% during this period.[2] This seismic shift into Eastern Kentucky's economic foundation is what led to a bipartisan formation of SOAR in 2013. SOAR is focused on the realization that Eastern Kentucky must diversify its economy to prevent another regional economic crisis as a result of a single industry's downturn. Its main goal is to spur economic development to replace not only the jobs lost related to the coal industry, but embracing the digital economy to create opportunities across all employment sectors.

THE REALITY

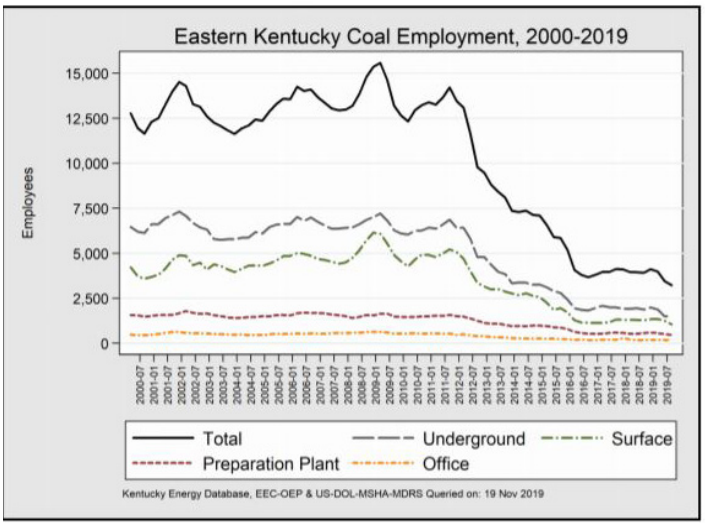


Figure 1: Illustrates the Eastern Kentucky Coal employment rates from 2000-2019.[2]

Figure 1 clearly illustrates the decrease in the coal industry employment rates from 2008 to 2016. This demonstrates the reason SOAR was formed, but it drastically understates the challenge at hand. Losing over two-thirds of the region's coal industry jobs does not adequately paint the picture of the state of the regional economy. The state of the regional economy is not clear, in large part, because prior to losing over 10,000 jobs, 38 of Kentucky's 54 Appalachian counties were already distressed. Creating 10,000 traded sector jobs would only return to Eastern Kentucky's economic standing in 2009. That means SOAR is not just working to replace 10,000 jobs but is seeking transformation that would address the deep-rooted economic challenges that have existed for decades in the region.

To put in this into perspective, the average workforce participation rate in Eastern Kentucky was 44.7%.[3] If the labor force participation rate increased to 55% (the national average is 63%), the region would add 39,242 people to the workforce.

2 Kentucky Quarterly Coal Report: April- June 2016. Rep. Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet, 30 July 2016. Web. <http://bit.ly/2dMkyYG>.
3 EKYWorks. Workforce Analysis. Boyette: strategic advisors. 2016. Pg. 29

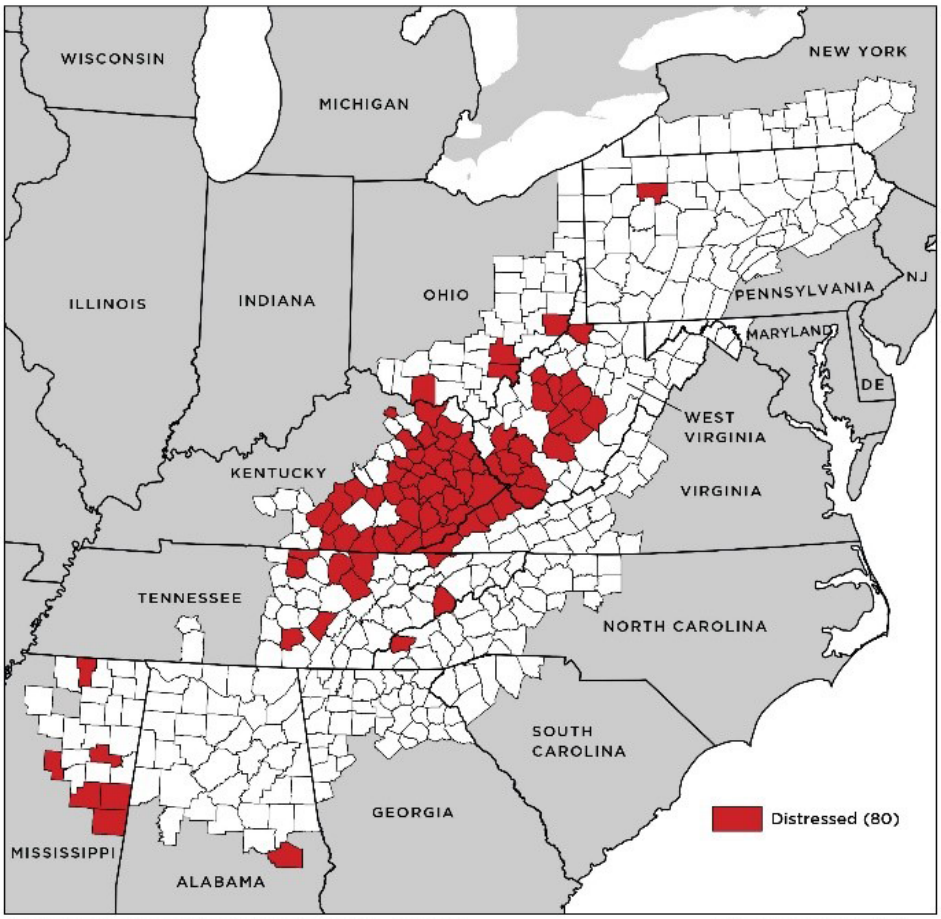
According to the ARC's Index-based county economic classification system

38 of 54

SOAR counties were distressed in 2019

ARC
APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION

ARC-DESIGNATED DISTRESSED COUNTIES
FISCAL YEAR 2020



Created by the Appalachian Regional Commission, June 2019
Data Sources:
Unemployment data: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, LAUS, 2015-2017
Income data: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, REIS, 2017
Poverty data: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017

Effective October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020

Figure 2: ARC's index-based county economic classification system that highlights the county economic levels in Appalachia.[4]

The economic reality illustrated in Figure 2 means not only must 30,000 jobs be restored, but additional jobs must be added. This can be seen in a recent study completed by Boyette Strategic Advisors, which shows that in a 27-county portion of Eastern Kentucky, the total employment rate dropped 20% (45,548 jobs) between 2006 to 2016.[5] These new jobs must drive real, meaningful, and economic growth in Eastern Kentucky.

How will SOAR solve such an overwhelming and seemingly impossible task? Thanks to working groups, listening sessions, and the input from thousands of people in the region, SOAR has solid information on what needs to be done to overcome the economic challenges. Many people are already working on these goals. The SOAR Blueprint is a plan built in the region, and an accumulation of ideas from Eastern Kentucky. It is taking everything Eastern Kentuckians know from living and breathing in Appalachia and combining it with local experts' analysis to determine a path forward.

4 Appalachian Regional Commission. County Economic Status in Appalachia, FY 20019. Map. Web. < https://www.arc.gov/images/programs/distress/DistressedCountiesMapFiscalYear2019.pdf> | 5 EKYWorks. Workforce Analysis. Boyette: strategic advisors. 2016. Pg. 29

the economy AS THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

The frame of reference for all goals and objectives in the Blueprint revolve around growing the economy of Eastern Kentucky. Figure 3 shows Ed Morrison and David Morganthaler's diagram which explains the way a regional economy functions.[6] Working from this frame of reference and understanding the economic urgency at hand, SOAR is focused on two things:

1. **INCREASING THE VOLUME OF GOOD MONEY**
   Good money is money that comes into the region from outside through the export of goods and services via manufacturing, remote employment, natural resources, distribution, etc.

2. **REDUCING THE LEAKAGE OF BAD MONEY**
   Bad does not mean "bad" in the truest since. It's not an effort or position that the region should not trade with outside regions, but rather to to do more business with local vendors and suppliers when opportunities arise.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN A NUTSHELL

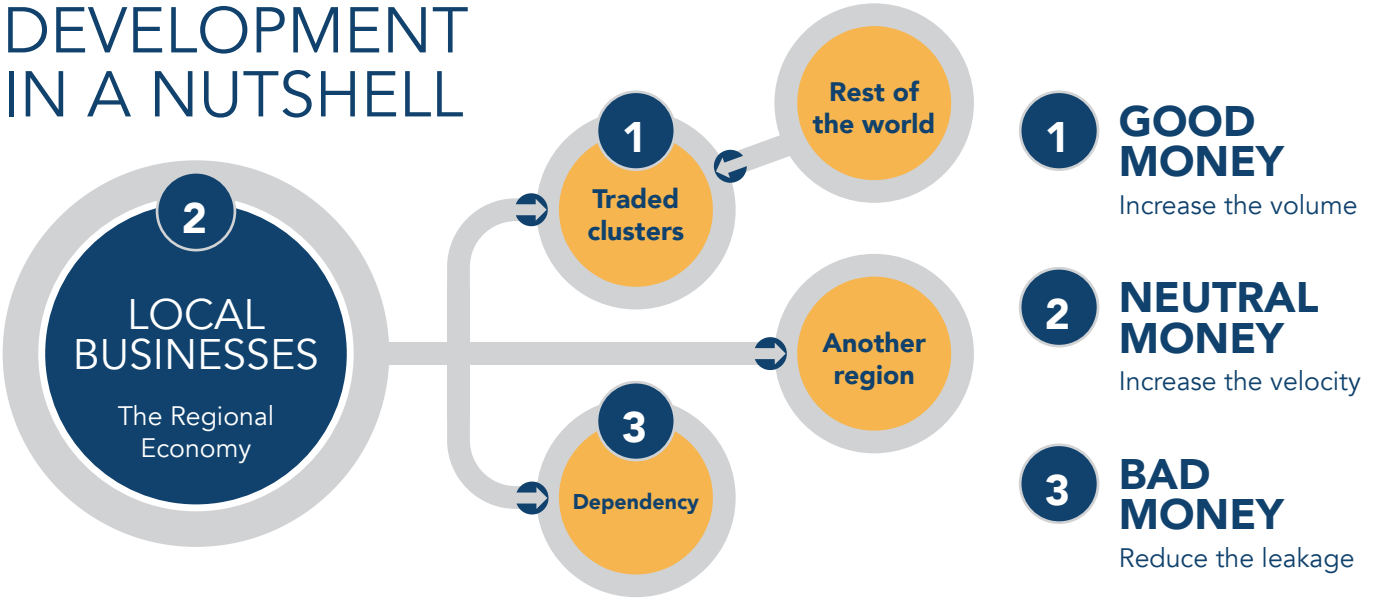


Figure 3: Asset mapping depicts the three flows of money, good, neutral, and bad.[6]

Source: Ed Morrison, David Morganthaler

6 Digital image. Economic Development in a Nutshell. Ed Morrison and Strategy-Nets, LLC.

assumptions

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY

At SOAR's foundation is the commitment to develop leaders and increase community capacity throughout Eastern Kentucky in order to impact the economy. SOAR bases this commitment on the premise that Eastern Kentucky's greatest assets are the people living in it. When the people are empowered, the communities can be empowered. This premise is best stated by Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach For America, "talent was the key element because it 'solves all the other problems.' "[7] This means, if Eastern Kentucky has strong, talented, and focused leaders, then these leaders will be a critical component of finding solutions. A large portion of SOAR's work includes increasing the number of and/or the capacity of Economic Developers, Elected Officials, Community Developers, Public Health Officials, Entrepreneurs, Small Business Owners, Educators, Healthcare Providers, Non-Profit Managers, and Workforce Development Officials.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Although there is not a specific goal or objective that directly identifies the need to engage or retain the next generation within the region, it is SOAR's belief that this is the crux of this Blueprint. By providing a path for economic opportunity, this economic Blueprint addresses a core requirement to retaining a thriving and healthy next generation.

PRIVATE SECTOR

It is SOAR's belief that the innovative and entrepreneurial approaches that characterize private sector development will be the key to coordinating the economic turn-around of Eastern Kentucky. This Blueprint is supported by this assumption and SOAR has approached every goal and objective with this in mind. While the government will facilitate and support an environment that is conducive to private sector employment growth, it will not lead the economic turnaround. The economic turnaround will come from within Eastern Kentucky.

7 Rath, Tom, & Conchie, Barry. Strengths based leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow. New York, NY. Gallup, Inc., 2008.

defining
THE BLUEPRINT

Below are SOAR's definitions for Goals, Objectives, and Strategies as they relate to this Blueprint.

- The **GOALS** are the major outcomes that the Blueprint is aiming towards. The goals provide direction for all objectives and strategies. Working towards and achieving these goals will ultimately create an economically stable Eastern Kentucky.

- The **OBJECTIVES** are measurable outcomes or milestones that can track the progress toward reaching the goals of the Blueprint.

- The **STRATEGIC PARTNERS/ALIGNED ACTIVITIES** are Blueprint-aligned activities supported by partners that will lead to accomplishing objectives. These are more specific in nature and are very clearly action oriented; they identify specific partners, specific locations, specific budgets, and specific outcomes. While SOAR provides structured and informed suggestions, the ultimate strategy choice is up to organizations and/or communities. Within each goal, SOAR has provided a list of suggested strategic partners who have had success reaching the objectives/milestones listed and might be able to help guide others.

Call to Action

The goals and objectives are regional and broad in nature. They provide guidance and direction for what needs to be done, but not dictate a specific path. They tell us where we are going, but not how to get there. While example strategies are listed...

All stakeholders are invited to **begin developing** strategies and solutions...

...that will lead their communities to accomplish the objectives and eventually the goals. All strategies/solutions should be tied to at least one objective.

This Blueprint enables users to turn the broad and overwhelming goal of "improving the economy" into small, manageable, specific, and actionable tasks distributed across a wide network of stakeholders in Eastern Kentucky.

The Approach

RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO PRIORITIZING STRATEGIES/SOLUTIONS

When considering prioritization of any of the strategies/solutions associated with the objectives that follow, several factors should be considered:

- Upfront costs of the Strategy vs the Potential Economic Impact of the Strategy (i.e. Does it directly impact increasing good money or reducing leakage and if so how far-reaching is the impact relative to the required investment?)
- Sustainability of the Strategy
- Likelihood of Success of the Strategy
- Economic Impact of the Strategy
- Private Investment and/or Private Sector buy-in related to the Strategy
- The capacity of leadership to follow-through on the Strategy
- Is there a champion, a record of success, suitable buy-in and participation from key partners?

BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY

Increase the availability of affordable high-speed broadband, through fiber, to businesses and residents; and increase adoption rates throughout the SOAR region

GOAL #1

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

1.1 Complete the construction of the middle-mile effort, KentuckyWired, while involving existing local Internet service providers in the process

1.2 Generate immediate local economic activity by facilitating career pathway training opportunities for displaced workers to be retrained into the fiber installation and maintenance industry to support the deployment of fiber throughout the region

1.3 Support the development of community-based strategic plans to determine the best method to improve broadband availability and affordability in their community by partnering with KentuckyWired

1.4 Ensure stakeholders working in the region understand and work collectively to increase the high economic impact uses of broadband including remote work opportunities and eCommerce

1.5 Develop and implement a structured approach to last mile development in the SOAR region

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Center for Rural Development
- USDA Rural Development
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- East Kentucky Network/Appalachian Wireless
- Kentucky Community Technical College System
- Kentucky Communications Network Authority
- Private-Sector Internet Service Providers

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- Technology Assistance Program by the Center for Rural Development
- Pike County Broadband Feasibility Study
- KentuckyWired
- Lynch Broadband Deployment
- Digital Careers Now
- EKU Manchester – Teleworks USA Digital Career Center
- Broadband Workshops
- Remote Work Marketing Strategies

BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY

21ST CENTURY WORKFORCE

Develop our regional workforce to be competitive in the digital economy and other emerging industries

GOAL #2

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

2.1 Strengthen employer-led training and education efforts to provide clear paths to jobs including reciprocal relationships with national/global employers that employ a remote workforce

2.2 Leverage public-private partnerships to create short and long-term training programs supporting industries primed for growth such as: Telecommunications (specifically fiber), Healthcare, Energy, Machinists, and the Digital Economy

2.3 Invest in programs across the K-16 education continuum that increase access to training and career pathways related to STEAM skills, digital economy skillsets, agribusiness and other emerging technologies

2.4 Develop modern co-working facilities that can also serve as business innovation hubs

2.5 Improve access to employment training/retraining programs for low-wage/unemployed individuals

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program
- Center for Rural Development
- Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- State, regional, and private colleges and universities
- Kentucky Education Development Cooperative
- Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative
- K-12 School Districts

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- Teleworks USA Hubs and Career Centers
- Digital Careers Now
- RN/Healthcare Talent Management Pipeline
- Eastern Kentucky Cyber Security Collaborative
- AppHarvest's High Tech Agriculture Container Farm
- Toyota Tsusho/Southeast KY Community and Technical College Makerspace
- Martin County Dream Discovery Center
- Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky
- Remake Learning Days
- East Kentucky Cyber Security Collaborative

SMALL BUSINESS

To create more and expand existing small businesses within the region by taking full advantage of the digital economy

GOAL #3

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

3.1 Focus assistance to support expanded market expansion opportunities for existing companies via the digital economy including e-commerce and export

3.2 Strengthen entrepreneurial education, including K-16, and the promotion of successful entrepreneurs within the region

3.3 Increase the network density of small business owners and/or entrepreneurs through social networks (digital or physical)

3.4 Improve awareness and usage of existing and expand availability of business resources, technical assistance, equity capital, and other assistance programs

3.5 Create and expand opportunities for entrepreneurs to competitively pitch ideas for monetary awards

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED)
- Center for Rural Development
- KY Cabinet for Economic Development Office of Entrepreneurship (KY Innovation)
- KY Small Business Development Center
- Mountain Association for Community and Economic Development
- Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation
- Invest 606
- Local/Regional Chambers of Commerce
- Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- State, regional, and private colleges and universities
- Kentucky Education Development Cooperative
- Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative
- K-12 School Districts
- KY Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK)

Examples of Aligned Activities

- SOAR Innovation
- CO.STARTERS
- Startup Appalachia Pitch Competitions
- Invest 606
- Tri-State Angel Investment Network
- Be Boss Online
- GROW with Google

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

To reduce the physical and economic impact of obesity, diabetes, and substance use disorder

GOAL #4

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

4.1 Implement innovative evidence-based programs to address regional health disparities in access, quality of care, and health outcomes

4.2 Strengthen community partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders to increase focus on health and disease prevention throughout the region

4.3 Reduce the scope and impact of substance abuse and related consequences through education, awareness, prevention and access to services

4.4 Increase access to healthy, affordable foods and opportunities for physical activity

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Operation UNITE
- KY Department for Public Health
- Local Health Departments
- Local Hospitals and Regional Healthcare Systems
- Foundation for Healthy Kentucky
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- UK Center for Excellence in Rural Health
- Pikeville Medical Center
- UK Healthcare
- KY College of Osteopathic Medicine
- KY College of Optometry

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- Statewide Call Center (FindHelpNowKY.org)
- Addiction Recovery Care's Peer Support Academy and Crisis to Career approach
- Substance Use Disorder Provider Education
- Operation UNITE County Coalitions
- Harm Reduction Expansion
- Second Chance Employment
- FARMacy Program in Whitesburg, KY

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Increase the amount of industrial employment which includes manufacturing, natural resources, processing, and distribution by expanding existing companies and attracting new ones

GOAL #5

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

5.1 Develop strategies for targeted sectors, identified by a third-party professional, for recruitment, expansion, and workforce development
   a. Examples of targeted sectors that have been identified in several communities include Healthcare, Auto Suppliers, Forestry, and Aerospace

5.2 Support the continued development of regional and/or public-private partnerships to drive industrial development in the region

5.3 Increase industrial demand of skilled trade workers (construction, electricians, HVAC, welding, plumbing) and the availability of fast-track certification programs for experienced workers

5.4 Improve the economic competitiveness of most viable (based upon objective third-party professional analyses) sites and buildings in Appalachia Kentucky

5.5 Provide resources to transition established businesses to value added chains and/or connect them with new markets both outside of their existing industry and in the global marketplace

5.6 Collect and positively communicate detailed data on the workforce in the region

5.7 Support value added opportunities for extractive industries including, but not limited to: coal, natural gas, oil, and forestry

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Ashland Alliance
- One East Kentucky
- Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED)
- One Harlan County
- Southern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Local Industrial Authorities
- Kentucky Association for Economic Development
- Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation
- Area Development Districts
- AEP Kentucky Power
- East Kentucky Power Cooperative
- Columbia Gas
- KY Cabinet for Economic Development
- KY World Trade Center

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- East Kentucky Works Workforce Study
- Supplier Education and Economic Development (SEED) Defense Contractor Symposium
- Build Ready Site Certifications
- Infrastructure Improvements at Regional Industrial Parks including Natural Gas, Electric, Rail, Water, Broadband, and Sewer
- ISO Certification Support
- KY Procurement Technical Assistance Center

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Create a local foods movement by connecting local producers to markets for their products both within and outside the region

GOAL #6

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

6.1 Increase the amount of locally sourced food served in institutional food service (schools, jails, colleges, hospitals), restaurants, and commercial grocers.

6.2 Start new and support the expansion of existing value-added agricultural businesses including processing, warehousing, distribution, etc.

6.3 Improve access to locally sourced food through the development of modern community-based farmer's markets.

6.4 Increase the competitiveness of local products and connect local producers to markets outside the region

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- Hindman Settlement School
- KY Center for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Grow Appalachia
- Community Farm Alliance
- KY Department of Agriculture
- KY Governor's Office of Agriculture Policy
- UK Cooperative Extension Offices
- Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- Kentucky Proud and Appalachia Proud
- SOAR Farm Loans from Kentucky Highlands
- Farm to School Programs
- Local Farmers' Markets
- Chop Shop in Hazel Green, KY
- Community Kitchens

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Establish Kentucky's Appalachian region as a tourism destination

GOAL #7

OBJECTIVES/MILESTONES

7.1 Support tourism projects that leverage existing assets to create attraction/destination based economic activity through private businesses such as theme parks, resorts, ATV Trails, etc.

7.2 Improve regional branding and marketing efforts increase awareness and demand for recreational activities

7.3 Increase demand for local arts and crafts by improving availability and visibility of products from our region

7.4 Invest in redevelopment of downtown spaces that focus on arts, heritage, and entertainment to improve the quality of place

7.5 Build upon regional assets that create unique identities for communities

7.6 Develop or facilitate training pathways for careers in the hospitality industry to prepare the region to leverage increased tourism demand for economic growth

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

These partners are part of the existing ecosystem that can support the realization of this goal:

- East Kentucky PRIDE
- Area Development Districts
- Local and Regional Chambers of Commerce
- Kentucky Arts Council
- Kentucky Heritage Council
- KY Main Street and Local Main Street Programs
- KY Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet
- KY Recreational Trails Authority

EXAMPLES OF ALIGNED ACTIVITIES

- East Kentucky Wildlands Branding and Marketing Campaign
- Appalachian Wildlife Foundation and the Boone's Ridge Development
- Harlan County Tri-Cities (Portal 31 Renovation and Black Mountain Overlook)
- Red River Gorge Cabin Rentals and Resort Development
- Rails to Trails Development
- Pineville, KY Downtown Development
- Thunder Mountain – Sport Shooting and Archery Resort Park

REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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V I S I T

SOAR-KY.ORG

There is a Future.org