

## Appalachian Voices awarded \$1.5 million to build solar in coal-impacted communities

By Kelsey Misbrener | September 17, 2021



Appalachian Voices was awarded \$1.5 million by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to catalyze commercial and institutional solar projects for coal-impacted communities throughout Central Appalachia. This award is part of a \$46.4 million package supporting 57 projects across 184 coal-impacted counties through ARC's POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) Initiative. POWER targets federal resources to communities affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations and coal-related supply chain industries.

"We are thrilled for today's announcement and thankful for the deep partnerships that made it possible," said Adam Wells, Regional Director of Community and Economic Development for Appalachian Voices. "The vision for the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund is rooted in the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia, which has worked since 2016 to bring the benefits of solar to coal communities in the commonwealth. The implementation of this program will be underpinned by the Central Appalachian Network, which links groups across the Appalachian region working to advance just transition and community-based economic development."

Since POWER launched in 2015, ARC has invested more than \$284 million in 320 projects across 353 coal-impacted counties. The \$46.4 million awarded today is projected to create/retain over 9,306 jobs, attract nearly \$525 million in leveraged private investments, and be matched by \$59.2 million in additional public and private funds across the Region.

ARC is working with Chamberlin/Dunn, a third-party research firm, to closely monitor, analyze and evaluate these investments. A new report, published in conjunction with the announcement, drew on 72 stories representing 44 unique POWER projects funded between fiscal years 2015-2020 to determine the most significant changes that occurred as a result of POWER.

The evaluation found that projects funded through POWER grants met or exceeded targets for jobs retained and/or created, businesses created, workers trained and revenues increased. Chamberlin/Dunn is continuing to monitor POWER investments and make recommendations to ARC for ongoing programmatic efficiencies.

The Appalachian Solar Finance Fund promotes economic diversification and creates positive economic impacts by deploying targeted financial tools to jumpstart emerging local solar markets and unlock new commercial and institutional solar energy projects that face unique barriers due to region-specific challenges. The SFF will use this ARC POWER award to deploy select subgrant awards for solar projects on nonprofit and public buildings.


The SFF also will develop investment and credit enhancement strategies and will facilitate competitive contracts for technical assistance for solar installations on commercial enterprises. The resulting solar projects will produce a powerful convergence of employment opportunities, business creation, new investments and wealth retention in Central Appalachian communities directly impacted by the decline in the coal economy.

In 2019, Appalachian Voices received a POWER Technical Assistance grant to support the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia's efforts and create a pathway to bring its models around solar development to scale; the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund is the result of that process.

"This project will build the right kind of pipeline in our region — a pipeline of investment for shovel-ready solar projects that ensure Appalachia remains a key player in the energy economy of the future," said Sarah Conley-Ballew, Director of Sustainable Energy Solutions at Rural Action in Appalachian Ohio, who will serve on the SFF Review Committee.

News item from Appalachian Voices

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR




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