



appalachian  
transition  
fellowship

# Appalachian Transition Fellowship Evaluation

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2018-2019 COHORT OF TRANSITION FELLOWS

A Program of:



REPORT PREPARED BY:



# Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>APPALACHIAN TRANSITION FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EVALUATION METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IMPACT OF THE FELLOWSHIP ON HOST COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IMPACT OF THE FELLOWSHIP ON THE APPALACHIAN TRANSITION FELLOWS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IMPACT OF THE FELLOWSHIP ON HOST ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMMING AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CLOSING SUMMARY</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>APPENDIX – FELLOWS AND HOSTS</b>	<b>17</b>

# Executive Summary

## Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this report is to help Highlander, Fellows, host communities, funders, and other key stakeholders to 1) understand the impact of the Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program on Fellows, host communities, and the region, and 2) make recommendations to improve this and/or other fellowship programs based on lessons learned and best practices from the Fellowship's successes and challenges in the 2018-2019 Fellows cohort.

## Evaluation Summary

The transition away from coal industry-dependent economies presents an opportunity to grow an Appalachian economy that is more diversified, resilient, and equitable. AppFellows was conceived as a strategy to grow the region's pipeline of diverse, young leaders and increase the collaboration and connectivity among place-based organizations working for a just economic transition.

In its third cohort, the program placed 10 next generation leaders in host communities within Central Appalachia. Following a comprehensive evaluation process that gathered quantitative and qualitative data, this report presents findings on the impact and effectiveness of the program, summarized here in the following four areas:

### Impact of the Fellowship on Host Communities

Fellows' projects built community-led power towards environmental and racial justice, economic diversification, community collaboration, and rural infrastructure. For example, Fellows:

- Tested home tap water safety, monitored environmental impacts of gas pipeline construction, and tested soil and air for lead and other contaminants, all to keep affected communities aware of the safety of their air, water, and soil.
- Organized residents to extend broadband service to highly rural communities.
- Engaged residents to participate more fully in local elections.
- Trained workers to use a trauma-informed care approach to children's development.

### Impact of the Fellowship on the Appalachian Transition Fellows

- Fellows have more connections, skills, and experience to succeed in economic transition work.
- Fellows have gained valuable awareness of their power and responsibility to accurately represent community interests when carrying out community development work.
- Fellows are more committed to carrying the torch of a just Appalachian Transition.

### Impact of the Fellowship on Host Organizations

- Hosts have increased capacity and are making progress toward their long-term goals
- Hosts have stronger connections and broader networks around the region and locally.

### Effectiveness of Fellowship Programming and Management

- The Management Team was highly supportive of Fellows' needs and responsive to issues that arose.
- The Management Team created necessary space for Fellows to process and discuss their work.

The evaluation also made recommendations for improvement, including more capacity to coordinate logistics and scheduling, ensuring that Host projects have Fellows engaged in growth-oriented activities, clarifying Host and Fellow expectations, and reconsidering how Fellows are compensated for their work.

# Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program Overview

Central Appalachia is in the midst of economic transition. The rapid decline of historical industries, such as coal and manufacturing, and the divisive nature of our current political climate has forced a groundswell in public dialogue around the region’s economic future. This attention presents an urgent opportunity to bring communities together with nonprofits, elected representatives, businesses, and funders to develop diverse economies. Meaningful cross-sector and community alignment around the Appalachian Transition allows community-based economies to prosper while protecting public interest and the environmental and cultural assets of the region. AppFellows seeks to capitalize on current transition momentum by increasing the capacity of communities and next generation leaders for the purpose of advancing just and resilient local economies across the region.

## Program Goals

AppFellows aims to (1) increase the capacity of local leaders, organizations, and communities to advance the economic transition, (2) strengthen the skills and leadership of a cohort of emerging leaders in the region, and (3) engage individuals and institutions across the region in stronger partnerships and collaborative networks.

For Fellows, the anticipated results were an increase in skills and capacity, new knowledge from trainings and experience, stronger peer and mentor support, stronger professional networks, greater knowledge of the region’s history and culture, and a sharpened sense of purpose and opportunity. For host organizations, the anticipated results were increased organizational capacity to collaborate on transition projects, stronger regional partnerships, and a commitment to developing the next generation of Appalachian leaders.

## Program Design

AppFellows completed its third year-long Fellowship from June 2018 to June 2019. Ten next-generation leaders each worked in two to three host organizations in communities around Central Appalachia, where they received training and mentoring and took on a host project that met specific needs in the host communities. Highlander Research and Education Center (Highlander) launched the first cohort of Fellows in 2014 after an initial 2-year planning period informed by local, regional, and national stakeholders.

Highlander’s AppFellows Management Team performs program development and coordination including host and fellow recruitment and matching, fellow mentorship and training, host organization support, workshop design, and coordination.

**Appalachian Transition Fellowship at a Glance**

**Participants**

- Ten Fellows across five states
- 28 host organizations comprised of multi-sector partnerships across education, nonprofit, for-profit, and local government institutions

**Activities**

- 12-month paid fellowship
- Ten-day orientation & learning tour of host organizations
- Five in-person skill workshops
- Four regional events for Fellows to participate in
- Three remote group meetings
- One Closing Gathering

Figure 1: At A Glance

## Evaluation Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify what the AppFellows program has done well, ways in which the program can improve, and to capture the important impacts of the program. Using a variety of data collection methods, this report presents findings in four areas:

1. The impact of the Fellowship on the host communities
2. The impact of the Fellowship on the Fellows' professional development
3. The impact of the Fellowship on host organizations
4. The effectiveness of Fellowship programming and management

Data collection for the evaluation components involved quantitative and qualitative data. Host organizations participated in two focus group conversations, and Fellows participated in four. Hosts and Fellows also completed a comprehensive survey that captured data in all four evaluation areas. These methods produced a deep understanding of the effectiveness of the program's processes, what the Fellows learned, whether and how the hosts were better off, and challenges encountered by Fellows and Hosts.

Fellows took responsibility for measuring the progress they made on host projects and the related impacts on the community. Each fellow developed an assessment framework that identified metrics to measure and report on their progress. They shared their outcomes throughout the final AppFellows Gathering during group conversations and their final focus group.



*Photo Credit: Highlander*

## Impact of the Fellowship on Host Communities

Fellows measured the impact of their projects using the Community Wealth Creation Framework, which uses eight forms of community wealth to better understand the assets within a community and the interventions that can strengthen them. Using this approach helped Fellows assess how their work benefited the constituents served by their host organizations.

Each fellow used these forms of wealth (see table) to build a measurement plan. Each plan defined goals, identified activities, determined indicators of progress, and eventually captured impacts. This section of the evaluation compiles the impacts of all fellow projects across each form of wealth that grew, providing a summary of the overall value and specific results of each fellow.

### Intellectual Wealth

Improved intellectual wealth gives people and communities better access to the knowledge and innovations needed to improve their lives, solve problems, and strengthen their community. As a movement, Appalachian Transition is dependent on the continuous development, refinement, and sharing of intellectual capital. Fellows led projects that continue to inform communities on key issues and provide access to necessary technology and knowledge. Results include:

- **A community-owned internet service provider will bring broadband to the Clearfork Valley.** In a highly remote and rural community, with no access to high speed broadband, let alone reliable cell service, one Fellow was integral in organizing for Cocke County, TN to have its own, affordable broadband internet access, owned by the rate-payers themselves.
- **Communities are more informed with up-to-date alerts about environmental impacts of the Mountain Valley Pipeline.** One fellow collected aerial imagery and other data to report to impacted communities about important violations that occurred during pipeline construction. This monitoring kept the community aware of ongoing issues and held the construction company accountable to environmental regulations.
- **Five workers trained in trauma-informed care will work in four Southern WV counties to promote children’s social and emotional development.** One fellow seized momentum from community interest in trauma-informed care as an approach to child development, which led five people to attend “train-the-trainer” workshops focused on the approach. Programs in the four counties are planned through 2020 and will increase understanding of how families can best heal and respond to the impact of trauma.
- **A new website, Facebook page, and newsletter offers Eastern Kentuckians the opportunity to read, share, and engage with positive stories about the region.** The “What’s Next EKY!?” online platforms helped to formalize the What’s Next network of community organizations and will serve as a critical organizing tool for their nascent work.



## Individual Wealth

In addition to good ideas, individuals need the skills, resources, income, and abilities to turn ideas into action. Building individual wealth is about increasing the health of individuals, the capacity of businesses, and the empowerment of community members to chart their own pathways to meaningful change. Fellows focused on youth and community building skills that can inform and set the foundation for both individual careers and community change.

- **Students enrolled in an Economics & Governance Course at Hazard Community & Technical College are more aware of the systems and policies that influence their lives.** One fellow assisted in adapting the curriculum for the course and supported classes. The students now have the knowledge and tools to understand how they can make change, and several have become so interested that they got involved in community groups and serve on local boards.



*Photo Credit: Courtnie Caldwell*

- **Ten youth participated in a small business curriculum to build their business skills and confidence.** The youth grew flowers, raised chicks, and made lemonade, all of which they sold at a culminating community event in Big Ugly, WV. Each child earned nearly \$18 and participants were thrilled to witness the youths' increased competence and confidence.

## Social Wealth

Change moves at the speed of trust, which means that a lasting Appalachian Transition relies on a foundation of relationships and community connections. Fellows worked to build community power towards community-led change in the following ways:

- **Built power towards racial justice.** Two fellows placed in Kanawha County, WV and McDowell County, NC built relationships and trust with people in their communities to chip away at structural and interpersonal racism. Using racial justice trainings for organizations and teachers, one fellow helped people identify and address structural barriers that prevent people of color from knowing and reaching their potential. Another fellow supported community forums and events that bring people together to build relationships, learn about common challenges, and organize around solutions.
- **Clearfork Valley residents in Tennessee feel a sense of ownership in the vision for their community.** Thanks to a community asset mapping project carried out by one of the Fellows, several social wealth outcomes followed:
  - Residents have more trust and interest in the activities of the Woodland Community Land Trust, which is leading the project.
  - Residents learned that their neighbors had complimentary skills and needs, and had help to coordinate them. For example, certain families needed childcare support at times and some neighbors had the desire, capacity, and trust to help out.
  - The Nature Conservancy recently purchased 100 acres of land in the Clearfork Valley. The asset mapping project has begun to serve as a touchstone that community members organize around to hold the Nature Conservancy accountable for what happens to the land.

- **“What’s Next EKY!?” Solidified its structure for building collaborations and partnerships among organizations in Eastern Kentucky.** Steering Committee members have stronger relationships with the organizations in the What’s Next network and their regional partners. They also began a conversation around the issues of equity and power in hopes to inform their future work and engagement with diverse communities.
- **A community garden program helped increase trust and engagement of at-risk and bullied youth.** Using a community garden as a draw, one fellow gained the trust of youth dealing with bullying and racism in McDowell County, NC., and helped build their confidence and empower them to speak up, ask for support, and generally excel. Garden participation also increased from four to 12 kids.



*Phot Credit: Alexis Boykins*

## Cultural Wealth

Appalachian Transition is also about a region that celebrates and sustains its diverse cultural traditions. Cultural wealth grows when communities lift up place-based, locally-controlled narratives that push back on outside stereotypes and generalizations about the region. AppFellows have honored the region’s heritage and identified needs to restore cultural assets and traditions. Results in this area include:

- **Fifty-five Southern West Virginians better understand their region’s history of mining and contributions to labor rights.** One fellow organized an event to restore pride in their region’s history of using their voice and actions to create real change. Recognizing that history was also a way to address the trauma associated with extraction, job loss, health issues, and more.
- **A study found increasing public disconnect from the land in Mingo County, WV due to lack of access.** One fellow supporting a land study in Mingo County, WV conducted one on one interviews with over 12 local residents to better understand their connection to land and found cultural traditions like agriculture were going away. Those interviewed and interested in the study continued to engage in next steps that seek to address concerns about lack of access to land.

## Natural Wealth

Appalachia’s economic transition must be ecologically sustainable, as the health of a region's natural resources is inextricably tied to its people's health, happiness, and ability to make a living. Natural wealth is increased by restoring, conserving, and protecting the environment in ways that allow communities to thrive. Fellows worked to address existing and potential threats to the region’s natural resources. Since much of the work to address natural wealth also involves other forms of wealth, related results will also be found in the built and political wealth sections.

- **Ensured that an ammunition plant near Blacksburg, VA was not polluting the air, soil, and water with lead and other contaminants.** One fellow supported research and testing of air and soil to inform the local community about potential contamination. Although none was found, the ammunition plant chose to change their practice from open air burns of discarded bullets and explosives to closed burns in order to respond to community concern.

## Built Wealth

Built wealth is the physical infrastructure that a community needs to be safe, healthy, and prosperous. The sectors that are driving economic transition also require infrastructure to allow them to thrive and grow. Fellows projects meet critical needs of communities around the region. Results include:

- **The Clearfork Valley in Tennessee put a \$400,000 grant from Mozilla towards developing community broadband infrastructure.** One fellow's project leveraged funds from a technology company towards community internet needs. This included a new device lending project in the Cocke County library system, with five well-equipped laptops and public internet hotspots, and a new cybercafé in the Clearfork Community Institute.
- **Home tap water testing will help inform households if their water is safe to drink.** One fellow working in Martin County, KY – where for over a year there have been frequent public water outages and discolored water resulting from old, neglected water infrastructure – tested tap water from over 30 homes. Results are shared with each household as to the safety and specific contaminants in the water.



*Photo Credit: Ricki Draper*

## Political Wealth

To be able to participate in a just transition, communities need a voice in resource allocation, decision-making, and policy development. Fellow projects built political wealth by influencing local policy and elections through increased civic engagement.

- **Local candidate forums engaged thousands of community members to participate in holding their future elected representatives accountable to the needs in Hazard, KY.** One fellow helped host candidate forums for each open and public election during the fellowship. Questions came from residents and InVision Hazard. Community engagement was very high: the event was streamed on Facebook where over 4,600 people viewed the forums.
- **One Fellow supported residents in Sevier County, TN to organize around acquiring community-owned rural broadband service.** The group began by gathering community input on what a community-owned internet service provider can look like and how the service is run and controlled.
- **Community members speak out about a pipeline's impact on their community to hold the company in charge of construction accountable.** One fellow interviewed local people to bring attention to real community concerns about the Mountain Valley Pipeline's construction and its impact on their community's land, water, and heritage.
- **Raised concerns to the Martin County Water District about water affordability and the impact of privatizing the water district's management.** In Martin County, KY where public water is unreliable and its safety is questioned, the fellow with the Martin County Concerned Citizens (MCCC) engaged residents to speak out together about the disagreement with a 44% rate increase to pay for deteriorating water service. MCCC also has a representative serving on the selection committee for choosing a private management company to manage the water utility.

## Financial Wealth

Financial wealth is about ensuring that families, businesses, and local institutions have the financial resources (income security, savings, endowments, etc.) that allow them to weather challenges and invest in opportunities.

- **Fellows helped raise over \$464,000 in grant funding to support investments in transition strategies.** One fellow's \$400,000 grant from Mozilla (mentioned above) will support internet access in TN. Another fellow's support led to multiple grants worth \$54,000 to support children and family programming in WV. Other fellows were awarded several mini-grants to support parts of their projects. Still, additional pending grants awaiting approval and worth over \$65,000 involved support for water testing and water infrastructure.

## Project Impacts Summary

In isolation, no single project or form of wealth can generate the systems-level change required in a just Appalachian Transition. Fellows only targeted a handful of forms of wealth through their individual projects, recognizing that they can't do it all themselves. Taken together, Fellows' projects brought critical information and technology to the region, built community power towards community-led change, and influenced local policy around the region. Because fellow projects were connected to the broader network of transition-oriented efforts, their impacts add up to meaningful progress towards the region's economic transition.

"This year I've seen what transition actually looks like in intimate Appalachian communities. To see more of that, we need to be shifting the power and resources to people spearheading those changes, and connect and mobilize on a larger scale."

~Anonymous Fellow

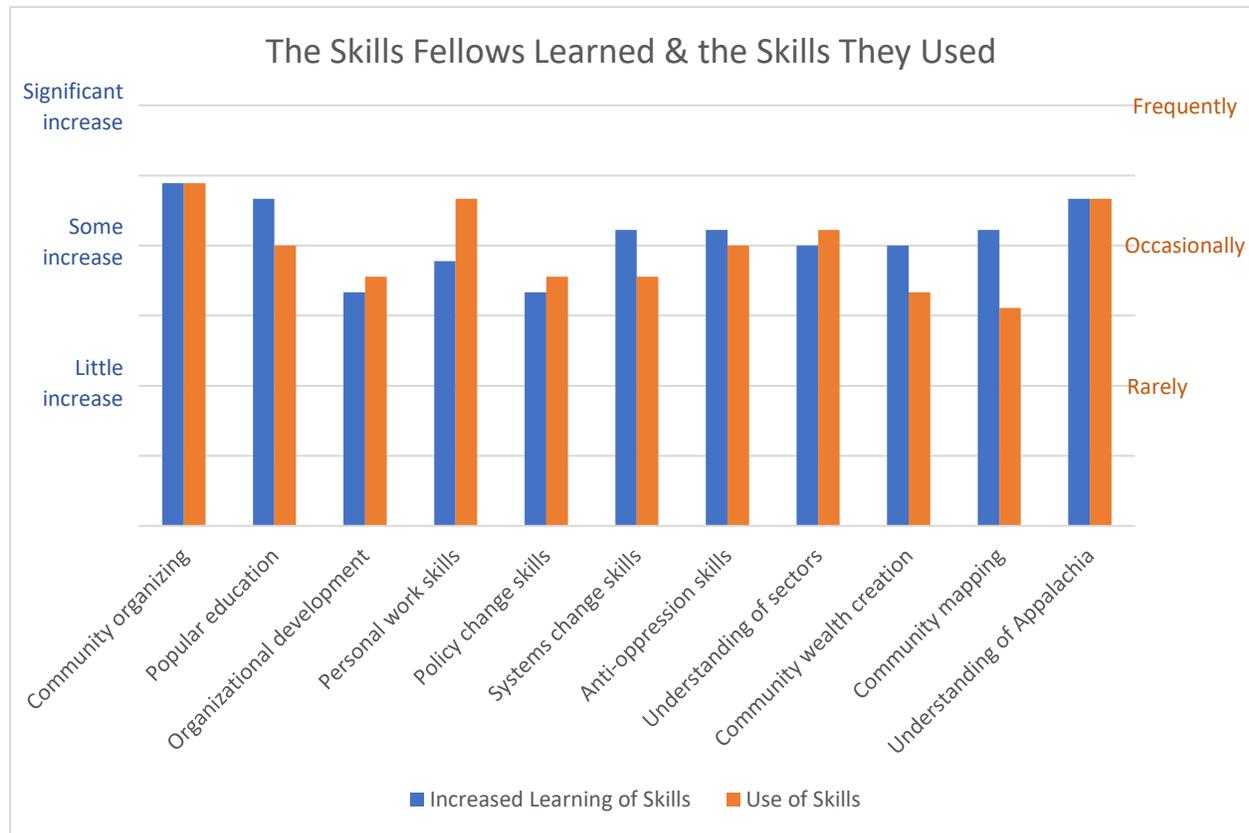


Photo Credit: Kandi Workman

# Impact of the Fellowship on the Appalachian Transition Fellows

## Professional Skill Development

The Fellows identified, through surveys and focus groups, numerous professional skills they acquired or deepened over the course of their Fellowship. Below is a graph comparing how much Fellows learned a set of specific skills and knowledge with how much they used those same skills. On a whole for the set of skills rated, they learned slightly more than they used throughout the year, averaging just above “some” increase in skills and just below “occasional” use of those skills.



In focus groups, fellows highlighted both hard and soft skills that they honed frequently. Since each Fellow’s project is different, many of the technical skills and knowledge they gained and used also differed.

- **Fellows gained a range of hard skills and technical knowledge to build their resume, including:**
  - Facilitation, nonprofit management, community asset mapping, and research
  - Computers and technology systems like website building, social media, email marketing, video editing, drone operation, and geographic information systems
  - Specialized knowledge in lobbying, local and federal governance, water infrastructure, and broadband infrastructure
- **Fellows learned to navigate effective ways of building relationships and trust with diverse people.** From community members to academics to staff, Fellows began to understand how best to relate to the people they worked with throughout the fellowship. At times, they found it difficult to

navigate the range of different self-interests, and learned that the best hope for real collaboration was first to build trust.

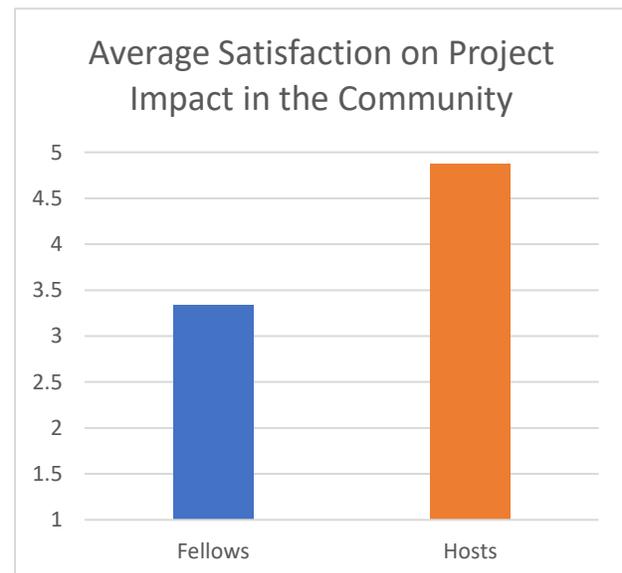
- **Fellows learned to meet people where they are with effective communication and framing.** Fellows saw quickly that in their conversations with community members and potential partners, it was important to frame their conversation with appropriate context and language that brings people in rather than turns them away.
- **Hosts witnessed Fellows learn to trust their own leadership.** Remarking on Fellows' growth, Hosts noticed newfound voice and action as their fellowship year went on. Fellows also began to see themselves as leaders, whether it was facilitating lobbying groups, identifying and then guiding an effort towards a new strategy, or becoming more vocal and action-oriented for a just cause.
- **When Fellows had some autonomy in a project, their confidence grew.** The flexibility those fellows felt to try out strategies, problem solve, and evaluate what works enabled enormous growth in recognizing their own power and confidence. It is worth noting that when fellows felt little autonomy or flexibility, they felt their confidence stagnated.

## Challenges Making Progress

Several Fellows felt disappointed with how much they were able to accomplish during their fellowship year. While all eight hosts who completed the survey reported high satisfaction with the impact the host project had in the community, fellows reported much less satisfaction. As in the graph displaying survey results, below, hosts averaged a 4.88 out of five in satisfaction (where five is strongly satisfied), while Fellows averaged 3.33 out of five (where three is neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied).

Some of this difference in satisfaction could be explained by hosts having more experience on their side to know how long it takes to see impact. On the other hand, some Fellows voiced specific challenges that account for the difference in satisfaction:

- Several Fellows felt little autonomy to contribute to planning how the host project was carried out. This usually had to do with a sense of not being heard, or they felt that their opinions were dismissed.
- A couple Fellows felt like they were seen as an intern and given mostly administrative tasks to complete.
- A couple Fellows felt a misalignment of values between their host and Highlander and thus experienced tension in how the Fellow wanted to approach the work vs. how the Host wanted to approach it.



In all of the above cases, the Fellows highly valued the support they received from Highlander to process and think through these challenges. Specifically, Fellows always had the opportunity to speak with someone from the Highlander Management Team to problem solve, and when they did, they came away prepared to address the challenge professionally.

## Lessons Learned and Insights

Fellows led varied projects and were placed in different contexts, yet certain common themes emerge from the lessons they learned throughout their fellowship.

- **Enter a community with respect and an intent to gain trust.** Fellows felt the weight of the importance of entering into a community (either as a newcomer or local) and they took seriously their position of responsibility to effectively represent the needs and hopes of people living there. Many learned to navigate different stakeholder interests and positions of power and became adept at communicating strategically, finding champions to help get traction, and empowering groups toward collective goals.
- **Fellows want to see nonprofits and their employees fairly compensated and adequately resourced to do the work expected.** Fellows saw that the type of people working at nonprofits are dedicated to a cause, and they often go above and beyond for that cause. For funders or even nonprofit leaders, it can be easy to take advantage of that dedication and place less value or give less financial support to those people or organizations than what is necessary to do that work. Fellows grew both a frustration with devaluing nonprofit work and, in some cases, a deeper commitment to address a pattern where people and organizations aren't appropriately resourced to do the work expected. They intuitively observed and grasped the destructive power of the well-documented "non-profit starvation cycle."

## Impact on Future Career Path and Commitment to a Just Economic Transition for Appalachia

**Fellows are much more committed to advancing a just transition in the region.** Nearly all the fellows responded that they strongly believed that they hold their values and beliefs more strongly as a result of the fellowship. Many will continue working in Appalachia towards just transition work, empowering communities to be heard, respected, and adequately resourced. While a couple fellows pursued jobs unrelated to just transition work, they, too, remain committed to that cause in other ways.

**Fellows are clearer about how they can contribute to change.** A major theme of how Highlander framed this year's fellowship was on building power within communities to organize around cooperation and shared objectives. They led an economics & governance curriculum with the fellows, so they gained concrete skills and knowledge about building power towards a social solidarity economy. This, supplemented with their day-to-day experiences within host communities, exposed them to a deeper understanding of the real-life obstacles and effective strategies to apply towards desired change. As a result, fellows are clearer on their own power to create change.

"The fellowship experiences were exactly what I needed to propel my life in the direction my soul desires...The fellowship will serve as the foundation for a projected life-long learning and teaching existence."

~Anonymous Fellow

"Highlander has changed my life for the better. The fog has cleared and I have so much clarity. I'm clear about my people's struggles, I'm clear about how I contribute to change."

~Anonymous Fellow

## Impact of the Fellowship on Host Organizations

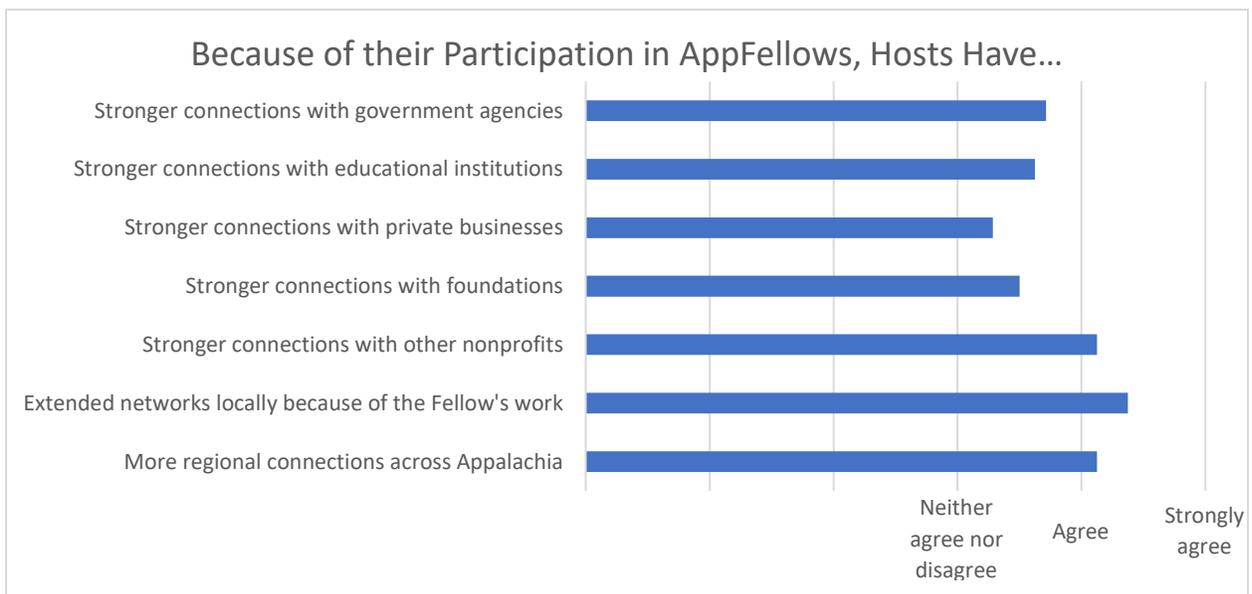
The fellowship placed fellows into “host communities” of two to three organizations representing the nonprofit sector, business, or education fields. Throughout the fellowship year, the Fellow worked with their hosts on one or more community development projects designed to foster collaboration and support common goals of the host organizations. Based on surveys completed by eight hosts as well as two focus groups during the year, hosts saw their organization benefit through more capacity, connections, and opportunities.

### Benefits to Host Organizations

**Hosts have increased capacity and are making progress toward their long-term goals.**



**Hosts have stronger connections and wider networks around the region and locally.**



## Lessons Learned Across the Host Organizations

Host organizations expressed some shared learning with the experience of hosting and mentoring Fellows. They identified the following lessons for anyone hosting a young leader as a Fellow or similar role:

- **Plan weekly work plan meetings to check in on the progress of the work and upcoming priorities.**

These can be short yet effective ways to maintain a working Host-Fellow relationship and can mitigate potential obstacles within the work on the horizon.

"They teach me and keep me honest."

~Anonymous Host

- **Set aside adequate time to intentionally mentor and check in with the Fellow.** Hosts expressed that they wished they had dedicated more time with their Fellow to find out what they were enjoying doing, what they were struggling with, and what they needed in the fellowship. Whether from a highly established and well-resourced organization or a two-person grassroots organization, all nonprofits are stretched for time, and they found it takes setting aside specific mentor time to pause and ensure the Fellow is developing professionally.

- **Fellows bring new ideas, energy, and excitement to their work, which helps re-energize seasoned veterans.**

Hosts benefited from listening to and witnessing Fellows enter this work with fresh perspectives because it helped them lift their head up from the daily work, consider new ways of working, and regroup themselves in why they started doing their work in the first place.

"Be open to them building unexpected relationships."

~Anonymous Host

- **Help Fellows explore their identities as Appalachians.** Some hosts found that as their Fellow learned more about the history and culture of Appalachia, they gained an important sense of pride in place – something they also see missing around Appalachia more generally – which increased the Fellow's purpose and drive for working towards a just Appalachian Transition.

- **Look out for future employment opportunities for your Fellow.** There may not be a role for the Fellow at their Host organization after the fellowship ends, so do what you can to point them in directions to find future employment and give them the space to build a network and explore future opportunities.

"Make sure there are plenty of opportunities for fun and some enjoyment with peers their age."

~Anonymous Host

## Effectiveness of Fellowship Programming and Management

This evaluation component identifies what the Fellowship Management Team did to coordinate the Fellowship, and how well it was carried out. Figure 1 on page 3 outlines the Fellowship by the numbers and the activities that the Management Team oversaw.

### What Worked Well

One of Highlander's strengths is leadership development – the kind of personal, deep, explorative leadership that informed historical figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. Their practiced approach to learning and leadership is modeled in the Management Team's facilitation, taught in their activities, and cultivated in one-on-one conversations. Throughout the fellowship, their approach was evident.

- **Fellows and Hosts felt highly supported by the Management Team.** Especially when Fellows experienced challenges, the Management Team was highly supportive and helped work through problems, large and small. Fellows found their emotional support valuable, and hosts found the check-ins to be useful as well.
- **The Management Team built trust of Hosts and Fellows by listening intentionally and responding appropriately.** Fellows found that they could call on the Management Team when they needed support and were met with compassion and given constructive feedback as relevant.
- **Fellows appreciated the space the Management Team reserved for processing, discussion, and joy.** Slowing down to think about community development work is rare, yet crucial. The Management Team makes sure Fellows and Hosts are grounded whenever they come together.
- **The Management Team created a community around important justice issues.** Fellows and hosts reported having better connections and a common vision around justice and equity and are more aware of how they can be involved in their community. Participants also valued the ability to see their work in the larger context of the Appalachian Transition movement.
- **The Management Team incorporated lessons from previous cohorts to improve Fellow placement in Host organizations.** From interview and selection through the year-long fellowship, most fellows felt placed at the right hosts and vice versa. When there were issues with placement, the Management Team worked to ensure the situation was resolved. Additionally, most hosts felt like the skills of the fellow matched the interests and needs of the project, with enough room for learning.

### Recommendations for Improvement

Overall, Fellows and Hosts reported fewer major challenges than in years past. Much of this was driven by an intentional pre-fellowship planning process and hiring former Fellows to serve on the Management Team. That said, Fellows and Hosts voiced challenges in surveys and focus group conversations, which are organized into the following recommendations.

- **Fellowship management and logistics need more capacity.** Although improved markedly from past cohorts, hosts and Fellows still saw need for additional capacity on the Management Team. This type of program requires the Management Team to coordinate events and logistics, communicate updates and opportunities, plan and execute skill trainings, administer details like reimbursements, solve problems, provide mentorship, and much more. Specifically, when event plans changed with too little notice, and when scheduling and logistics were late, Hosts and/or Fellows needed to rearrange their schedules or simply could not attend or find a representative to attend instead. Earlier notice would allow for the most Host and Fellow participation possible.
- **Ensure Host projects entail Fellows take on meaningful & growth-oriented activities.** Since a couple Fellows felt like the work they were asked to do was administrative in nature, it is important that hosts develop projects that give the Fellow adequate professional growth opportunities.

- **Help Fellows better understand what is expected of them.** Ensure that Hosts work with the Fellow to identify milestones of the Fellow's progress on the Host project and their professional development.
- **Reconsider paying Fellows on contract for health insurance and tax burden reasons.** Fellows were responsible for their own health insurance, which, if not already obtained through a spouse, was a large expense on a minimal Fellow stipend. Many were also ill-prepared to incur such a large tax bill when it came time to pay their taxes. At this stage in Fellows' careers, such a tax burden served them poorly.
- **Skill trainings should align more with skills needed at the Hosts.** Fellows reported a need for more skills training ranging from work planning and prioritization, to tips on how to appropriately enter into a community, to community organizing methods. Understanding that needs vary across host projects, the Management Team could consider gauging Fellows' needs for certain skill training periodically during the fellowship.
- **Lengthen the Fellowship to 18 months or more to enable more follow-through on the Host project.** Fellows experience a learning curve the first few months and feel much more confident after about six months of working with their Hosts. Many Fellows who were not hired by a Host organization wished they could see their project through and better set it up to be sustainable beyond their time.

## Closing Summary

Taking into account all the impact made in communities, on Fellows, and on Hosts, the 2018-2019 AppFellows cohort was resoundingly successful in its strategy to strengthen the capacity of Fellows and build power towards community-led change around the Appalachian region.

The AppFellows Program mobilized 10 young leaders to understand their own power to organize and create the kind of just transition communities are demanding. Fellows have more connections, skills, and experience to succeed in economic transition work, and a deeper commitment to ensure that any transition is just and equitable. Most of these young leaders, and the two Fellow cohorts before them, continue to work in and for the region, spreading the vision for more prosperous communities along the way.

Host organizations got re-energized in their work thanks to the perspective their Fellow brought to the table and to their connection to Highlander and the other Hosts working towards just transition goals. Many have reported that they are more committed and hopeful about the next generation of leaders. Hosts also benefitted tangibly with higher organizational capacity, new funds raised, and noticeable progress towards organizational goals.

Communities around the region have also created more trust and cohesion to make progress on the challenges holding back better and more just outcomes. Fellows built community-led power toward environmental and racial justice, economic diversification, community collaboration, and rural infrastructure. As a result, communities are more informed about important and/or positive news affecting them. More residents are engaging in political process and local elections. More companies are being held accountable for their actions. Highly rural and under-resourced communities have access to high-speed internet. More people are informed whether their water is safe to drink.

The road to a just Appalachian Transition is long and difficult, and it requires more collaborative and inclusive leadership to accelerate the momentum gained over the past decade. The Fellowship has been a critical part of growing community leaders who are connected, collaborative, and all walking the same road towards Appalachia's bright future.

## Appendix – Fellows and Hosts

### Kentucky Host Communities

Ricki Draper: Appalachian Citizens Law Center, Martin County Concerned Citizens

Brandon Jent: MACED, Appalshop, Brushy Fork Institute of Berea College

Courtne Caldwell: InVision Hazard, MACED

### North Carolina Host Communities

Alexus Boykins: West Marion Community Forum, McDowell Technical Community College, The City of Marion, NC

### West Virginia Host Communities

Raynalle Rouse: CARE Coalition, West Virginia Center for Budget and Policy

Kandi Workman: Step by Step, Transformation Specialists, Coalfield Development Corp.

### Virginia Host Communities

Shannel Arellano: WMMT, Mountain Valley Watch

Olivia Lowery: Virginia Tech, Beans and Rice, New River Calley Planning Commission

### Tennessee Host Communities

Katie Myers: SEAD Task Force, CWEET, Sunset Gap Community Center

Morgan Pennington: SOCM, Woodland Community Land Trust