



NEWS RELEASE

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NACo announces teams selected to participate in effort to assist coal-reliant counties

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Counties (NACo) today announced the third phase of an effort to assist counties and regions that have experienced economic challenges related to the coal industry.

With support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, NACo and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation are hosting an “Innovation Challenge” to support job creation, business growth and long-term strategies that will benefit communities seeking new approaches to economic development. Under the first phase of this program, seven county-based teams participated in an educational workshop in Pikeville, Ky., in April. An additional eight teams attended a similar conference in Grand Junction, Colo., in September.

This final phase shifts geographic focus back to Appalachia. Counties and regions formed multi-sector teams to submit applications to attend a workshop in West Virginia in November. The winning teams will also be able to access technical support from NACo and NADO Research Foundation before and after the workshop.

“We are thrilled to be collaborating with EDA and NADO Research Foundation on this important effort,” said NACo Executive Director Matthew Chase. “Counties and regions are at the forefront of fostering economic prosperity in America’s communities. This initiative will empower some of our country’s hardest-hit communities with tools to advance local and regional economic resilience.”

The teams are led by:

- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (representing Monroe County and Wayne County)
- West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (representing Muskegon County)
- Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (representing Cibola, McKinley and San Juan counties)
- Armstrong County, Pa.
- New River Valley Regional Commission (representing Giles County, Va.)
- New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (representing Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh and Summers counties, W.Va.)
- Kanawha County, W.Va.
- Mason County, W.Va.

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Each team will benefit from individual assistance before and after the event that will help them to implement strategies related to economic diversification, asset-based development, cluster development, workforce training, broadband, recreation and tourism and entrepreneurship.

Rick Handley, President of the Mason County Commission and Chairman of the Region II Planning and Development Council in West Virginia, stated, "Participation in the Innovation Challenge workshop will aid us in crafting a flexible, comprehensive approach to solving common problems resulting from the loss of coal-dependent jobs and revenues. We aim to advance Mason County's growth toward its full potential, and to engage and serve our citizens. We are confident that with positive leadership, strong community-wide involvement, and solid teamwork and partnerships, our future will indeed be bright, thanks to this opportunity."

Similarly, Kevin Byrd, Executive Director of the New River Valley Regional Commission in Virginia, noted, "Participation in this workshop will provide dedicated time for the team members to collaborate in a focused environment and gain a better understanding of the resources and opportunities available to assist Giles County in charting its economic future. Our team is looking forward to leveraging existing programs to create an integrated approach to supporting the local community."

For more information about the Innovation Challenge for Coal-Reliant Counties and Regions, visit www.naco.org/InnovationChallenge.

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The [National Association of Counties](http://www.naco.org) (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government, and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.