



State of Ohio Appalachian Regional Commission

2025 ANNUAL STRATEGY STATEMENT



MIKE DEWINE
GOVERNOR OF OHIO



**Department of
Development**



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Upper Falls at Old Man's Cave in Hocking Hills State Park



January 2025

Dear Executive Director McBride,

Appalachian Ohio is a region of breathtaking beauty, vibrant culture, and untapped potential. From its rolling hills and scenic landscapes to its resilient communities and deeply rooted traditions, this area embodies the spirit of Ohio—hard work, perseverance, and a deep commitment to building a brighter future.

The State of Ohio is dedicated to realizing this promise through meaningful investments that address Appalachia’s unique challenges and opportunities.

My administration has made historic investments to empower communities, creating a foundation for long-term growth. Through targeted initiatives, we address critical needs such as infrastructure, broadband access, and workforce development to ensure Appalachian Ohio remains a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

Enclosed is Ohio’s 2025 Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Annual Strategy Statement, developed in alignment with Section 5 of the ARC Code. This plan provides an outline of Ohio’s goals and priorities for the program year, along with specific areas of focus that support ARC’s strategic vision.

Through collaboration with local leaders, community organizations, and our partners at ARC, we are committed to unlocking the full potential of Appalachian Ohio.

Thank you for your continued support and shared commitment to the State of Ohio and the people who call this great region home.



Very respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mike DeWine'.

Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio

Introduction

The State of Ohio submits this Annual Strategy Statement in compliance with Chapter 5 of the Appalachian Regional Development Commission (ARC) Code. Ohio's 2025 Annual Strategy Statement describes the Governor's goals, objectives, and priorities for Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties and serves as a guidance document for the Governor's Office of Appalachia (GOA) and Ohio's four Local Development Districts.

The priorities presented are designed to address Appalachian Ohio's unique needs and to improve the region's community, educational, and economic prosperity by focusing ARC and State of Ohio funds.



Key areas highlighted in the statement include:

ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCE OVERVIEW:



Examines the specific economic challenges and opportunities within Ohio's Appalachian counties, spotlighting new resources and developments impacting the area.

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES:



Outlines Ohio's targeted investment priorities for the upcoming program year, identifying critical areas that require focused support.

DISTRESSED COUNTIES STRATEGY:



Lays out strategies for addressing the needs of Ohio's most distressed counties and communities, aiming to stimulate economic recovery and resilience.

PROJECT SOLICITATION AND REVIEW METHODS:



Describes the approach used to solicit, review, and select impactful projects for ARC and state funding.

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF APPALACHIA



Governor Mike DeWine
Ohio Commission Member



Director Lydia Mihalik
Ohio Department of Development



Director John Carey
Governor's Office of Appalachia

STAFF:

Julia Hinten
ARC Program Manager

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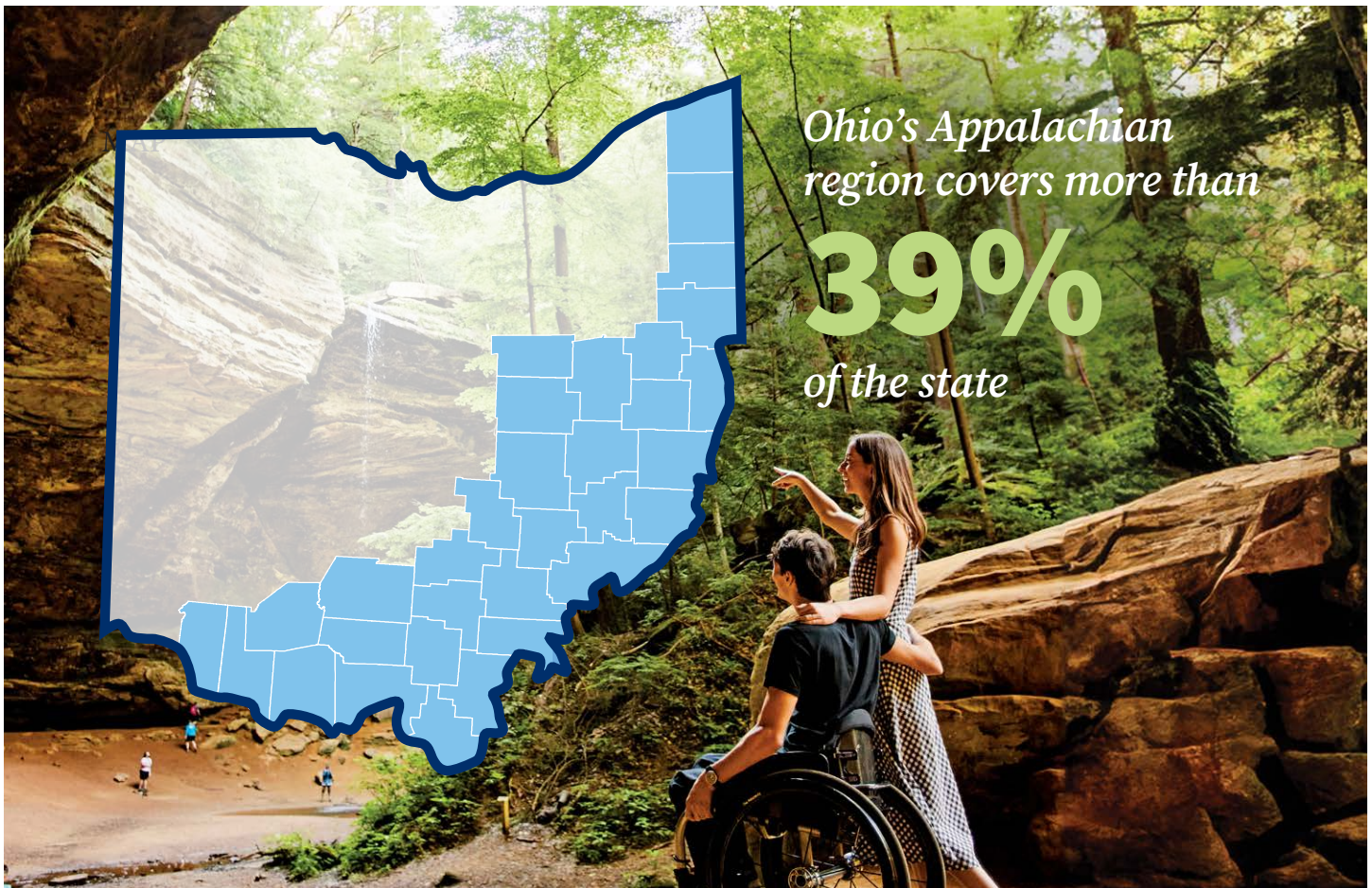
Diane Oyer-Meadows
Business Analyst

This Annual Strategy Statement includes input from the Office of Governor Mike DeWine, the Office of Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik, Governor's Office of Appalachia, and Ohio's four Local Development Districts.

Overview of Ohio's Appalachian Region

Stretching from the shores of Lake Erie to the banks of the Ohio River, Ohio's Appalachian region encompasses 32 counties and covers more than 39 percent of the state. Known for its rolling hills, winding rivers, and rich cultural heritage, Appalachian Ohio is a region of breathtaking natural beauty and tightly knit communities, shaped by its unique history and geography.





Counties include: Adams, Ashtabula, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Clermont, Columbiana, Coshocton, Gallia, Guernsey, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mahoning, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Vinton, and Washington.


With a population density of only 123 people per square mile—less than half the state average—Appalachian Ohio's rural landscape is one of its defining characteristics. More than 57 percent of the region is forested, providing an abundance of natural resources and opportunities for outdoor recreation, tourism, and conservation. The area also boasts a hardworking and

diverse workforce skilled in trades, manufacturing, agriculture, and other high-demand sectors, contributing to the state's economic growth.


The region's rich history is woven into its economic roots. Industries such as coal mining, agriculture, steel production, and manufacturing once powered Appalachian Ohio's economy, and while these industries have declined, the area is adapting to new opportunities. State initiatives, including the Appalachian Community Grant Program and workforce training efforts, are equipping residents with tools to succeed in today's economy.



< 2M
RESIDENTS



29%
HAVE A COLLEGE DEGREE



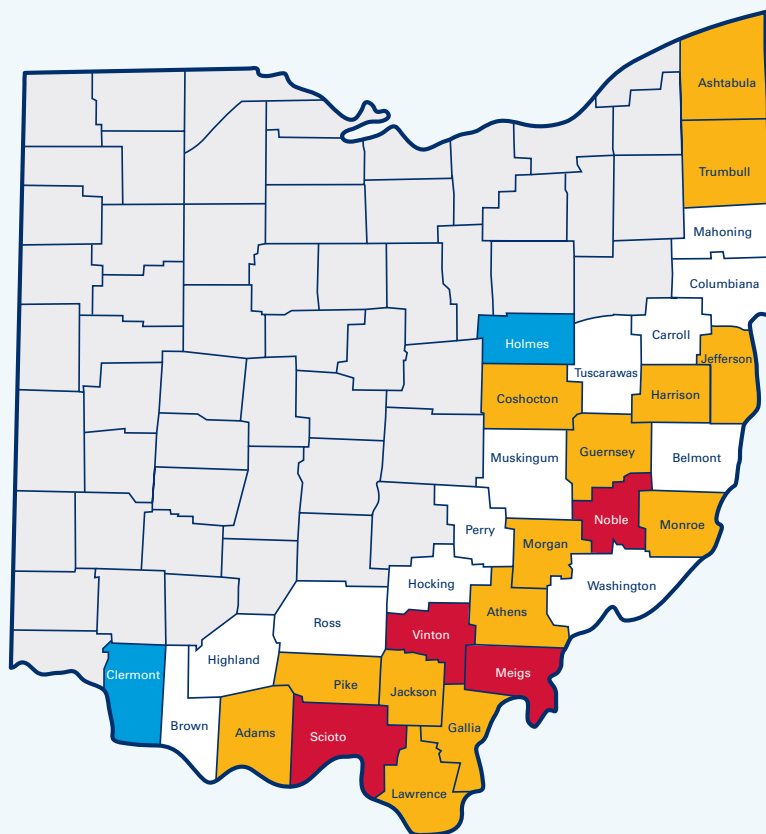
57%
FORESTED LAND



Appalachian Ohio's cultural and natural attractions are unmatched.

Ohio's Appalachian counties are home to historic landmarks such as the state's first capital, Chillicothe, and the Clermont County Ohio Freedom Trail. Visitors and residents alike can explore the stunning Hocking Hills State Park, the Ohio River Museum, and the rolling foothills carved by glaciers that left behind a rugged and picturesque landscape. The region also boasts cultural highlights, including the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, designated in 2023 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the largest Amish populations in the world.





County Economic Status in Appalachian Ohio

Fiscal Year 2025

- Distressed County
- At-Risk County
- Transitional County
- Competitive County
- Attainment County

DISTRESSED COUNTIES: MEIGS, NOBLE, SCIOTO, VINTON

The Appalachian Regional Commission evaluates county economic status annually, designating categories ranging from “attainment” to “distressed.” Distressed counties are among the most economically challenged, ranking in the lowest 10 percent nationwide. In FY 2025, Ohio has four counties classified as distressed: Meigs, Noble, Scioto, and Vinton.

A common challenge faced by these counties is the lack of reliable broadband access. To address this issue, the Governor’s Office of Appalachia and BroadbandOhio have developed a comprehensive strategy to maximize Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding. This initiative also leverages designated ARC funds to improve connectivity in these underserved areas, laying the groundwork for enhanced economic opportunities.

In addition to broadband efforts, Ohio is prioritizing the use of ARC’s POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) and INSPIRE (Initiative for Substance Use Disorder Prevention and Recovery) programs in these counties. Technical assistance funds from ARC support these initiatives, helping to develop targeted solutions that address critical needs.

To further empower local communities, GOA will collaborate with Local Development Districts (LDD) to assist county leaders in generating innovative project ideas, developing strategies, and submitting proposals for ARC Distressed County funds. These efforts aim to provide tangible support to some of Ohio’s most vulnerable communities, fostering long-term economic growth and resilience.



Opportunities

Ohio's Appalachian region faces unique challenges that also present significant opportunities for growth and revitalization. By addressing these obstacles through targeted investments and collaborative efforts, the DeWine Administration is laying the foundation for a brighter future for Appalachian Ohio.

Access to clean drinking water remains a critical issue in parts of the region, where aging systems and limited resources create vulnerabilities. To combat this issue, the state has made historic investments in water infrastructure through programs like the Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grant Program. These initiatives have already funded more than \$220 million in projects across Appalachian counties, modernizing systems and expanding access for underserved communities.

Similarly, broadband access is limited in some parts of the region, with many areas still underserved or unconnected. Recognizing the importance of closing

this digital divide, the State of Ohio has committed \$793 million in BEAD funding to expand high-speed internet access. BroadbandOhio, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Appalachia, is ensuring that these funds prioritize distressed counties, enabling access to education, telehealth, and remote work opportunities.

The region's ability to respond to emergencies—whether natural disasters or public health crises—remains a priority. Investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and community support are enhancing economic and disaster resilience, ensuring Appalachian Ohio is prepared to navigate future challenges.

The opioid crisis has deeply affected Appalachian Ohio, straining families, healthcare systems, and communities. To address this concern, the state has directed resources through ARC's INSPIRE program and other initiatives that focus on recovery, workforce reentry, and prevention efforts. These programs are helping to rebuild lives and strengthen the fabric of Appalachian communities.

The region's natural and cultural assets—its trails, waterways, parks, and historic downtowns—are major strengths that position it for significant economic growth.



Central to this vision is the **Appalachian Community Grant Program**, established through Ohio House Bill 377 and signed into law by Governor DeWine in June 2022. With \$500 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding dedicated to

the 32-county Appalachian region, this transformative initiative focuses on large-scale projects that enhance community development, infrastructure, workforce readiness, and healthcare. These strategic investments aim to revitalize communities, expand opportunities, and improve the quality of life for the people of Appalachian Ohio.

To support this program, the DeWine Administration secured 20 planning firms and provided technical assistance funds to all 32 counties, enabling communities to organize and design impactful projects.

As a result, nine major implementation awards were made, representing a pivotal step toward a stronger, more prosperous Appalachian Ohio.

Awarded during FY 2023, the initial round included four shovel-ready projects that received a combined \$50 million. The state also allocated \$30 million in planning and technical assistance funds to help communities prepare their projects and applications for the second round of funding.

During FY 2024, Governor DeWine, U.S. Senator Jon Husted (then Lieutenant Governor of Ohio), Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik, and Governor's Office of Appalachia Director John Carey made four rounds of announcements across the 32-county region. Announcements totaled \$422 million and included funding for the Appalachian Children's Health Initiative (\$64M), the Appalachian Downtowns and Destinations Initiative (\$154M), and the Wonderful Waterways Initiative (\$204M).



Children's Health Initiative



In March 2024, Governor DeWine announced a \$64 million award in support of the Appalachian Children's Health Initiative, which will create or expand community- and school-based health clinics, launch healthcare-focused workforce development programs, and improve access to vital health services across the region.

The funding is supporting 28 projects expected to impact a staggering 61,000 students and 375,000 residents across 20 Appalachian counties. Partners included 34 school districts, a career technical school, an educational service center, and 16 healthcare partners. The expanded services will include comprehensive primary care, dental, vision, and mental health services for children, families, and communities.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INITIATIVE

\$64M
IN GRANTS

20 COUNTIES SERVED

16 HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

34 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

36 COMMUNITIES

61,000
STUDENTS SERVED

ESTIMATED TO REACH

375,000
PEOPLE IN APPALACHIAN OHIO



Governor DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine visit with children at Campbell Schools after announcing the Children's Health Initiative.

SUCCESS STORY

Campbell City Schools

At Campbell City Schools, students and community members will soon benefit from more than just a quality education. **The school district is receiving \$10 million to construct a new, 55,000-square-foot facility to provide a comprehensive array of programs.** These programs include an on-site food pantry, greenhouse, composting facility, healthcare services (including both on-site and telehealth), childcare, workforce services, and medical education programming.

This initiative builds on the vision of Superintendent Matt Bowen, who has been instrumental in creating, operating, and maintaining similar community assets. With the goal of enhancing holistic community health, Bowen and the district have collaborated with various community partners to integrate career credentials with higher education opportunities.

The new center will complement existing services at the adjacent Community Literacy Workforce and Cultural Center and the Northeast Ohio IMPACT Academy, focusing on improving social determinants of health for the entire community.



Superintendent Matthew Bowen

The 55,000-square-foot facility will offer:

- On-site food pantry
- Greenhouse
- Composting facility
- Healthcare services
- Childcare
- Workforce services
- Medical education programming

SUCCESS STORY

East Central Ohio Educational Service Center

Rural healthcare providers face significant challenges to establishing and maintaining operations, including recruitment and retention issues, financial challenges, and lack of infrastructure and resources. As a result, limited health and wellness services force families to drive long distances to receive care. The East Central Ohio Educational Service Center (ECOESC) helps to fill the healthcare gap, serving more than 20 school districts and reaching more than 27,000 students from communities in five counties.

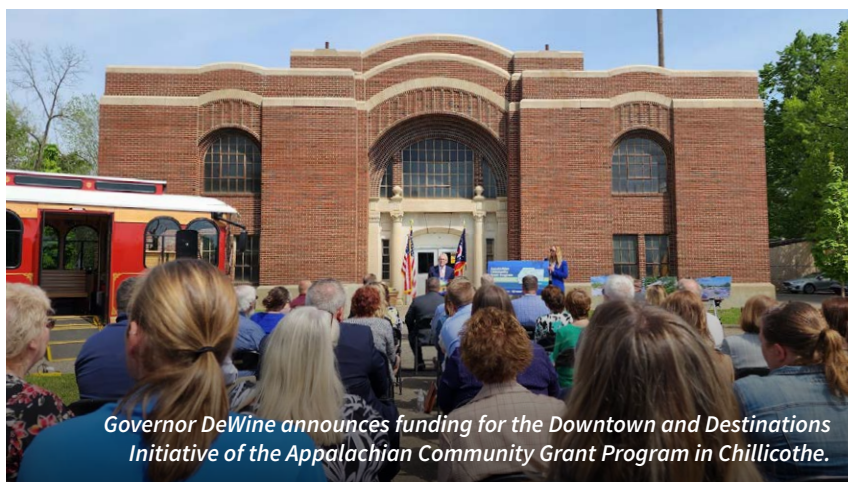
With a \$3 million grant from the Appalachian Children's Health Initiative, ECOESC plans to expand its services at a new location in St. Clairsville, creating a regional hub for increased access to healthcare services and workforce development programming for students, families, and adult residents of Belmont and surrounding counties. In partnership with the Ohio Hills Health Center, ECOESC will provide both primary care and dental services, including one health care provider and one licensed practical nurse or medical assistant, one dentist, one dental hygienist, and one dental assistant, providing a local, accessible option for healthcare for students and residents alike.

Downtowns and Destinations

The Appalachian Downtowns and Destinations Initiative focuses on revitalizing historic downtown districts, creating new recreation opportunities, and enhancing experiences for visitors to the region's cultural sites.



With an investment of \$154 million across 12 counties, the initiative focuses on improving infrastructure at parks, trails, and museums, supporting enhancements to historical landmarks, renovating downtown spaces and main streets, and establishing new hubs for education, economic development, healthcare, and community engagement. Communities including Chauncey, Georgetown, Jackson, and Logan are among those benefiting from the initiative.



Governor DeWine announces funding for the Downtown and Destinations Initiative of the Appalachian Community Grant Program in Chillicothe.

DOWNTOWNS & DESTINATIONS

\$154M
IN GRANTS

30 PROJECTS

26 COMMUNITIES

12 COUNTIES SERVED

11 HISTORIC SITES

12 TRANSFORMED
DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

SUCCESS STORY

Logan

Hocking Hills State Park, known for its stunning natural beauty with waterfalls, caves, and hiking trails, is a beloved destination attracting millions of visitors each year. The \$14 million Gateway to Hocking Hills project aims to transform downtown Logan into a vibrant and welcoming corridor for park visitors, while also creating a more walkable and livable downtown for residents. This transformative project will fund various enhancements, including new signage, archways, improved landscaping, and decorative intersections. A section of Main Street will be converted into a "complete street," reorganizing surface parking to accommodate wider sidewalks and a shared-use path, significantly improving pedestrian safety. Additionally, new lighting will be installed to enhance the visual appeal and safety of the downtown district.

Chillicothe

Chillicothe's Yoctangee Riverside District will undergo a complete transformation to support its growing tourist population with a \$35 million grant through the program.

These comprehensive projects aim to significantly enhance the Yoctangee Riverside District, making it a more vibrant and accessible area for both residents and visitors.

The project includes restoring the city's underutilized armory into the UNESCO World Heritage Sites Visitors' Center. In 2023, UNESCO World Heritage Committee issued their decision to inscribe Ohio's Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks as the United States' 25th addition to the World Heritage List.

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, which include five locations managed by the National Park Service and three managed by the Ohio History Connection, were built by Native Americans between 1,600 and 2,000 years ago. They are complex masterpieces of landscape architecture and are exceptional among ancient monuments worldwide in their enormous scale, geometric precision and astronomical alignments.

"We've been daydreaming for a couple of years. Today we get to celebrate and then tomorrow the hard work begins." – Chillicothe Mayor Luke Feeney

In addition to the visitors' center, the project includes the construction of a nearby pavilion to host year-round farmers' markets, which will bolster the local economy and provide a venue for community gatherings. Renovations and expansions to the Mighty Children's Museum will enhance its educational offerings and attract more families to the area. The park's recreational fields will see major improvements, including the construction of an amphitheater for outdoor



performances, pickleball courts, and the refurbishment of the baseball field, creating a dynamic space for both recreational and cultural activities.

Wonderful Waterfronts

The Wonderful Waterfronts Initiative takes advantage of the natural beauty of Appalachian Ohio, transforming local waterways into vibrant destinations for tourists and locals alike. Enhancing the scenic riverfronts not only boosts the local economy but also promotes outdoor activities such as boating, fishing, and hiking, allowing residents and visitors to fully appreciate and enjoy the region's stunning landscapes.

More than \$152 million was awarded to communities in 12 counties to expand access to local waterways, revitalize historic riverfront downtowns, and create new tourism and recreational opportunities. Projects include outdoor infrastructure, new river-to-downtown connections, downtown redevelopment and streetscape improvements, boat ramps, docks, and parks.

WONDERFUL WATERFRONTS

\$204M
IN GRANTS

39 PROJECTS

37 COMMUNITIES

20 COUNTIES

25 WATERFRONT
RECREATION PROJECTS

8 DOWNTOWN DISTRICT
TRANSFORMATIONS

5 IMPROVED RECREATION
TRAIL NETWORKS

Riverfront communities receiving funding include:

Beverly, Burlington, Gallipolis, Higginsport, Ironton (2), Marietta, McConnellsville, Middleport, New Richmond, Portsmouth, Proctorville, Racine, Ripley, Sardis, South Point, and Zanesville.

Other projects included downtown revitalizations in Caldwell and New Philadelphia.

“

“When people come to Ohio (from the south), we are the very first thing visitors see. As they say, impressions can make or break an experience for people.”

—Nate Welch, Executive Director
Scioto County Convention and Visitors Bureau



SUCCESS STORY

Portsmouth

The Portsmouth Riverfront will improve access to the Ohio River and amplify tourism and recreation in the city. **With a \$34 million grant from the Appalachian Community Grant Program, the city of Portsmouth's riverfront will be redeveloped to include outdoor parks, recreational amenities along the river, riverfront murals, an amphitheater, improved walking paths, the installation of a fishing pier, and campsites.**

These revitalization efforts will make downtown more walkable, better connect the community to the river, and enrich experiences at popular festivals like

Portsmouth River Days and Winterfest. This blend of modern amenities and historical context promises to make the Portsmouth riverfront a vibrant and attractive destination for both residents and tourists.

"We're told by people in local communities that 'We'd like to do more with the river. We would like for it to be more of the community. We'd like to have an opportunity to really get more tourists to come to this area, but also for our own people to really, really use the river,'" Governor DeWine told WOWK. "It's their ideas. It's their vision, and they're the ones who know best, and they're the ones who, with this money, are now going to be able to really transform Portsmouth."

SUCCESS STORY

Higginsport

On the banks of the Ohio River, just 40 miles east of Cincinnati, sits an abandoned ballfield in the village of Higginsport. With a population of just over 200 people, the village has historically lacked the resources to make improvements and, despite its location on the river, has no public access for water recreation.

With a \$6.3 million grant through Ohio's Wonderful Waterfronts Initiative, the village will redevelop the ballfield and surrounding land into a seven-acre community park. The park will create a public gathering space for the community in addition to a boat dock and launch for water access for residents and visitors alike. Additional improvements include the construction of a fishing pier, bridge and mural at the new park.



Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik announces state support for roadway improvements in Monroe County.

Additional Successes

The Governor's Office of Appalachia is proud to celebrate the completion of several projects funded through the Appalachian Community Grant Program. Among the first to be completed is the Utica Shale Academy of Ohio, which officially opened in August 2024. This transformative initiative received \$2.3 million for its "Connecting Communities Through Workforce Training" project, designed to create career pathways for residents in Columbiana, Carroll, Jefferson, and Mahoning counties. The project expands workforce training services across three strategically located training centers, focusing on reskilling and upskilling individuals to meet the demands of a competitive labor market. Participants are being trained for high-demand fields such as heavy equipment operation, welding, industrial maintenance, robotics, 3D printing, broadband infrastructure, and diesel mechanics. These skills equip residents with the tools to secure sustainable, living-wage jobs, contributing to both personal growth and regional economic vitality.

The success of projects like the Utica Shale Academy of Ohio is rooted in collaborative partnerships. GOA Director Carey visits all 32 Ohio Appalachian counties annually to build and strengthen relationships with local and regional

leaders. Governor DeWine has directed his cabinet to work in cooperation with GOA, which has encouraged several valuable partnerships aimed at solving important problems and capitalizing on emerging opportunities. These partnerships include other offices in the Department of Development, state agencies, local officials, and economic development groups. Through these relationships, GOA will pool resources and knowledge to help improve opportunities in the region. Currently, GOA is working with more than a dozen state agencies on various projects.

GOA works closely with the Mayors' Partnership for Progress (MPP) which partners with the Ohio University Voinovich School for technical assistance. The MPP brings together mayors and city managers from throughout 21 counties in Appalachian Ohio to share information and resources and tackle common issues. The MPP is a vital resource for the success of GOA programs. They assist in finding funding opportunities, and they also help to secure additional capacity to manage local, state, and federal funding programs for projects that impact member communities. The MPP ensures region-wide success by fostering a non-partisan environment of collaboration to address various issues in Appalachian Ohio.



Development Director Lydia Mihalik and GOA Director John Carey toured H&H Industries, Inc., a locally owned family company in Jackson County, one of the largest over-the-road facilities in the world.



State Policy Overview of Ohio's Appalachian Development Program

The Governor's Office of Appalachia coordinates with Ohio's four Local Development Districts (LDD) to administer the following programs: Appalachian Local Access Road, Area Development, and Distressed Counties. The office also reviews and helps solicit applications for ARC's competitive POWER and INSPIRE initiatives. Funds for these programs come from either the Appalachian Regional Commission or the State of Ohio's General Revenue Fund.

Interested applicants work directly with their LDD to design and refine proposed projects. For most of the grant programs, applicants submit completed pre-application or application forms to their LDD and apply for funding. LDD staff and board members review, score, and rank applications to create a board-approved district funding package. The LDDs submit the funding packages to the ARC program manager and the Governor’s Office of Appalachia director for review. Projects included in Ohio’s investment packages support the goals and objectives of the ARC and the State of Ohio Four-Year Appalachian Development Plan and Annual Strategy Statements. GOA will review all projects for ARC eligibility, feasibility, match commitments. They will also ensure the outcomes and outputs align with ARC code and program guidelines.

All projects funded with federal ARC or state Appalachian development funds require a match based on the ARC-determined economic status of the county where the project will be located. Based on the county economic designation and total project cost, match is determined by the following requirements:



Project Funding Match Requirements:

County Designation	Match
Distressed	80/20 percent
At-Risk	70/30 percent
Transitional	50/50 percent
Competitive	30/70 percent
Attainment	ARC and state Appalachian development funding is usually not available for projects located in ARC-designated attainment counties

Local Development Districts

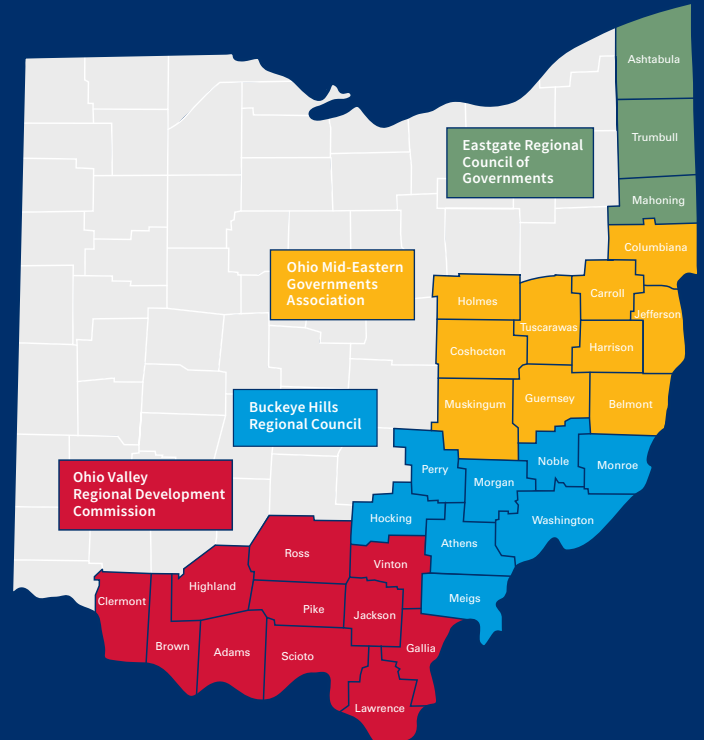
Ohio's four Local Development Districts (LDD) play a pivotal role in coordinating economic development at the local level, serving as a bridge between communities and the Governor's Office of Appalachia. These districts—Buckeye Hills Regional Council (Buckeye Hills), Eastgate Regional Council of Governments (Eastgate), Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA), and Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (OVRDC)—are instrumental in advancing projects tailored to the unique needs of Appalachian Ohio.

Each LDD works closely with board members, local leaders, and citizens to create economic development plans that address their communities' most pressing concerns. By employing a "bottom-up" approach, they foster collaboration and community engagement, ensuring projects reflect local priorities. LDDs prioritize projects through a scoring process. Criteria include provisions to focus additional support, funding, and resources for counties designated by ARC as "distressed."

LDDs identify the strengths, barriers, opportunities, and threats to their member counties. The LDDs work with their governing boards, members, and citizen advisory groups to evaluate and prioritize the economic needs in their respective regions and identify solutions organized around ARC's five goals:

- **Building Appalachian Businesses**
- **Building Appalachia's Workforce Ecosystem**
- **Building Appalachia's Infrastructure**
- **Building Regional Culture and Tourism**
- **Building Community Leaders and Capacity**

To maximize project success, the Governor's Office of Appalachia hosted a comprehensive training for Local Development District staff in the fall of 2024. The training featured presentations from Appalachian Regional



Commission Technical Assistance staff and included an in-depth review of ARC's processes. GOA provided detailed guidance on the application platform, including step-by-step instructions for advancing projects to the federal ARC office.

Building on this effort, GOA will visit each LDD region in 2025 to showcase a project of their choice. These visits will provide an opportunity for LDDs to discuss their approaches to community outreach and project selection while highlighting successful initiatives. Insights from these visits will be shared during the next full LDD training, fostering a collaborative environment where districts can exchange best practices and adopt effective strategies to enhance their impact across the Appalachian region.

Each Local Development District works closely with board members, local leaders, and citizens to create economic development plans that address their communities' most pressing concerns.

Ohio's Investment Priorities for 2025

Broadband Access

While technology continues to reshape the way we live and work, many residents of Appalachian Ohio still lack reliable access to high-speed internet. Governor DeWine's Ohio Broadband Strategy outlines a plan to provide high-speed internet access to all Ohioans. In June 2023, Governor DeWine, then-Lt. Governor Husted, and Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik announced \$793 million from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program to support the state's internet expansion efforts. BroadbandOhio, a division of the Department of Development, will administer the state's allocation of BEAD funding under the guidance of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

BroadbandOhio works closely with the Governor's Office of Appalachia to expand access in the region and to complement their respective programs. GOA and



BroadbandOhio have worked together on a strategy to maximize BEAD funding in these counties and will utilize ARC-designated funds for Ohio's four distressed counties to achieve this goal. Ensuring Ohio's Appalachian residents have reliable access to internet, especially within the distressed counties, will help transform lives and the local workforce.

Infrastructure

Access to reliable, affordable, resilient, and energy efficient infrastructure in the Appalachian Ohio region is crucial for communities to be able to thrive and experience healthier lifestyles. Developing and maintaining basic infrastructure and utilities is the foundation on which local economies can be built up stronger and better than ever. In 2021 the DeWine-Husted Administration launched the Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grant Program to help Ohio communities make necessary investments in water and wastewater infrastructure. The program is administered by the Department of Development in partnership with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. As of May 2024, the program has awarded more than \$220 million to 148 projects across the 32 Appalachian counties. By supporting communities in Appalachian Ohio as they work on their critical water and sewer infrastructure systems, Ohio can serve current and attract future businesses and residents.

SUCCESS STORY

ARC, GOA and Eastgate Council of Governments approved a project for the City of Cortland for a water main replacement that directly impacts 28 businesses in the downtown area. The total project cost is \$708,442 and will ensure reliable water distribution along the commercial district in downtown Cortland. The most recent break in the aged-out main line impacted water pressure city wide, so this project will also indirectly impact 2,733 households once it is replaced.

Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Appalachian Ohio is home to food production and oil and gas industry clusters. These industries and their suppliers employ a large portion of the region's workers. However, entrepreneurship and small businesses also play a vital role in the economy. Ohio has and will continue to fund projects that foster entrepreneurship, and the administration will continue to support workers and businesses in all sectors.

Appalachian Ohio is preparing to attract businesses with industry-ready sites.

1,300+
*food manufacturers
call Ohio home*



Director Mihalik and Director Carey visit General Mills in Wellston

SUCCESS STORY

Salt Creek Industrial Park in Jackson County received a total of \$3.6 million for a 30,000-square-foot spec building with an additional 38 acres ready to be developed. OhioSE, JobsOhio, the Department of Development, and the Jackson County Economic Development Partnership are among the many partners who helped make this project a reality.

In 2024, the Youngstown Business Incubator (YBI) was awarded \$1,795,000 for their Rising Tides Initiative. This project will help position incumbent manufacturers located in Ashtabula, Belmont, Columbiana, Jefferson, Mahoning, Monroe, and Trumbull counties for entry into the microchip, advanced energy, defense, and

aerospace industries. Rising Tides will provide existing manufacturers with comprehensive technology education, impactful pilot/demonstration programs, federal research support and other targeted initiatives to enhance manufacturer competitiveness.

Rising Tides will also support emerging companies currently incubating in two regional technology incubators: Youngstown Business Incubator, focused on business software and advanced manufacturing technologies, and BRITE Innovation Center, supporting electric vehicle mobility, battery storage, and grid infrastructure. This project is expected to improve 90 businesses and 180 workers/trainees, create two new businesses and 20 new jobs, and leverage \$9,050,000 in private investment.

Tourism

Tourism is a major economic driver in Ohio and presents significant opportunities for growth in the Appalachian region. By leveraging its rich history, natural beauty, and cultural attractions, Appalachian Ohio is uniquely positioned to attract more visitors and boost local economies.

The Governor's Office of Appalachia works with TourismOhio to develop a coordinated strategy for growing tourism in the region. Through partnerships with other state agencies, such as the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), as well as local convention and visitors' bureaus, economic organizations, and businesses, GOA is working to help increase the number of visitors to local communities and build tourism strategies.

Additionally, GOA participates in TourismOhio's yearly joint marketing program, which provides content creation like storytelling, as well as advertising like

social and paid search. To further assist communities with limited tourism budgets, the program offers a 25% contribution toward the cost of their media campaigns or content creation, helping them showcase their unique attractions and experiences. In 2023, GOA marked its fourth year of collaboration with TourismOhio's joint marketing program. Efforts included storytelling campaigns, connected TV (CTV) ads, social media outreach, and paid search, generating more than 3 million impressions, 36,000 engagements, and 145,000 video views across CTV and social platforms.

The storytelling campaign, *Unlock the Secrets of Ohio's Appalachian Country*, highlights the region's rich history, natural wonders, and artistic inspiration while showcasing destinations such as the John Rankin House, Selby 100 Mile House & Garden, Adams Lake State Park, Edge of Appalachia Preserve, Ravenwood Castle, and the Ariel Opera House. These stories are featured prominently on TourismOhio's Appalachian Region landing page, driving awareness and interest in the region.

OTHER ONGOING TOURISM STRATEGIES

- Highlighting the people, hospitality, and unique appeal of Appalachian communities to attract visitors.
- Partnering with Local Development Districts to identify places of interest to focus promotion.
- Providing the Economic Impact Report generated by Ohio's Appalachian Country with funding assistance. This organization uses data to drive policy discussion and investments in Appalachian tourism. The report assists counties in marketing tourism as an economic development focus.
- Collaborating closely with ODNR to highlight state parks throughout the region and strengthen connections between natural attractions and nearby communities and downtowns.



Ineligible Projects:

Projects and activities ineligible for federal ARC funds or State Appalachian funds are:

Projects related to local governments' general operations, including constructing city halls, courthouses, jails, and fire departments as well as salaries and operating costs related to these governmental functions.

Political activities of any kind, whether at the local, state, or national level.

Those that do not adhere to the completion deadline of 36 months (for construction) and 12 months (non-construction). Projects requiring a longer timeline will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The ARC Program Manager may withdraw the balance of funds if a project cannot be completed within the agreed-upon project period. ARC reserves the right to withdraw grants for projects not under contract within 18 months of approval.

Registered State Basic Agency Program

The Governor's Office of Appalachia also serves as a Registered State Basic Agency (RSBA) for federal ARC construction projects. This allows for more flexibility and support for projects within Ohio. The Department of Development contracts with Appalachian Management Systems, LLC to help perform the necessary duties of a RSBA. An ARC grant also helps fund the office to serve in this role. Ohio would have significantly less flexibility and fewer construction projects without the RSBA program.

ARC Competitive Programs: POWER, INSPIRE, ARISE

POWER

Since 2015, the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) grant program has allocated federal funds to help boost communities and regions affected by the decline in jobs related to coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries. As of October 2024, POWER has invested more than \$487 million in 564 projects throughout all of Appalachia and Ohio has received 80 awards totaling \$70.2 million.

Ohio utilizes technical assistance funds from ARC to contract with two uniquely qualified individuals who provide grant writing and technical support to prospective applicants. This has helped increase both the quality and quantity of applications submitted from Ohio and helped the communities most in need compete for these funds.

2024 AWARD HIGHLIGHT

Project Title: Appalachian Educator EmPOWERment Consortium

Grantee: Ohio Valley Educational Service Center

Award Amount: \$1,750,000

The Appalachian Educator EmPOWERment Consortium is tackling the teacher shortage in Southeastern Ohio by developing an innovative and accessible model for teacher education. This initiative provides an affordable pathway to licensure for aspiring educators, ensuring a pipeline of qualified teachers to serve Appalachian communities.

The program begins by offering high school students the “right 30” College Credit Plus (CCP) credits tailored to teaching. These students also participate in apprenticeships within member school districts across 12 counties, gaining early hands-on experience in the classroom. After high school, participants transition to community college as a cost-effective bridge to a four-year institution, where they complete their bachelor’s degree in education while engaging in two-year paid apprenticeships within the same districts.

The program aims to train and retain 27 qualified educators, who will collectively educate 675 students in Appalachian Ohio, addressing critical teacher shortages and enriching the region’s education system.

INSPIRE

Established in 2021, the Investments Supporting Partnerships in Recovery Ecosystems (INSPIRE) initiative addresses the substance use disorder crisis within Appalachia. The program creates and expands an ecosystem of recovery for individuals which will lead to entry and re-entry into the workforce. Project investment examples include supporting the post-treatment to employment track, investments in local health care facilities and professionals, and recovery-focused job training programs. As of October 2024, the initiative has invested more than \$53 million in 166 projects since its creation, with \$7.2 million being awarded to 21 projects in Ohio.

2024 AWARD HIGHLIGHT

Project Title: REACH Appalachia Recovery Initiative
Grantee: R.E.A.C.H. (Restoring, Educating, Advocating, Collaborating, and Hope) for Tomorrow Inc.
Award Amount: \$50,000

The REACH Appalachia Recovery Initiative will empower individuals in recovery by providing comprehensive vocational, certificate, and apprenticeship programs to individuals in Highland, Ross, and Pike counties. The project will fund a comprehensive needs assessment and feasibility analysis, focusing on identifying specific vocational training needs in key sectors such as administration, construction, auto maintenance, and food service. The team will collaborate with existing training programs, or design tailored initiatives, to align with regional job market demands. It is anticipated that one comprehensive plan and/or feasibility study will be completed as a result of this proposed project. This program aims to establish an employment services agency dedicated to supporting individuals in recovery by providing human resources support to employers by managing hiring, urine screenings, transportation assistance, and case-by-case management to enhance the overall reliability and longevity of recovery employees.

ARISE

Ohio has also benefited from ARC’s Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) program which was created in 2021 through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This multi-state program focuses on large-scale, regional economic transformation. The application process differs from other ARC programs and begins with a concept paper submission. Successful applicants have strong partnerships in multiple states and address at least one of ARC’s strategic investment priorities. As of fall 2024, ARC has announced 17 awards totaling more than \$49 million that impact Ohio.

2024 AWARD HIGHLIGHT

Project Title: Preparing Appalachia for a Sustainable Electric Aviation Future
Grantee: Ohio University
Award Amount: \$500,000
All States Impacted: OH, KY, NC
Partners: North Carolina State University Institute for Transportation Research and Education; Ohio Department of Transportation, Office of Aviation; North Carolina Department of Transportation, Division of Aviation; Kentucky Department of Aviation

Ohio University and partners will work with state departments of aviation to prepare a plan to integrate new aviation technologies in regional airports, impacting 36 counties. The ongoing development of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) – a new generation of less expensive, more flexible electric aircraft – is expected to create economic growth opportunities and expand the availability of this aviation service. AAM aircraft will provide new air transportation options, both within Appalachia and between the region and adjacent urban centers. This planning study will support regional airports' efforts to prepare to meet the requirements for this new aviation technology.

ARC Youth Programs

- The Appalachian STEM Academy is a gateway to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) for students in the Appalachian Region. The program provides hands-on learning experiences for middle and high school students, as well as selected high school teachers in STEM-related fields.
- The Appalachian Entrepreneurship Academy (AEA), allows high school students from across the region to participate in creative programs that help them develop skills essential for entrepreneurial success. Participants have the opportunity to develop and implement business ideas, prototype those ideas, and deliver a Shark-Tank-style pitch presentation.
- The interest ARC's program generated in Ohio's Appalachian students inspired the Building Bridges-2-Careers STEAM Camp in Marietta to begin in 2019 and expanded to include middle schoolers in 2024. The University of Rio Grande in Gallipolis began its STEM camp in 2023. Both camps are funded by GOA to provide a free experience to student participants and have had continued success and growing interest.



ARC Academies and Institute

ALI Program

The Appalachian Leadership Institute is a nine-month, free leadership and economic development training opportunity for Appalachians who are passionate about helping their communities thrive. The program is competitive, capped at 40 fellows each cohort that represent all 13 Appalachian states. Throughout the program, the fellows have multiple site visits in the region and conclude with a graduation ceremony in Washington DC.



A lasting impact of the program is the creation of a robust alumni network, fostering collaboration and connection among its participants. In October 2024, Ohio became the first Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) state to host its own in-state Appalachian Leadership Institute alumni event. Held in Tuscarawas County, the gathering brought together 18 alumni who extended invitations to Ohio's three newly selected 2024–2025 participants, welcoming them into the network. Building on the success of this event, the alumni group is planning another in-person meeting for Spring 2025.





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