



State of Ohio Appalachian Regional Commission

2026 ANNUAL STRATEGY STATEMENT



MIKE DEWINE
GOVERNOR OF OHIO



**Department of
Development**



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January 2026

Dear Executive Director McBride,

As Governor of Ohio, I have spent time reflecting on the people and places that define our state. Appalachian Ohio stands out as a region that captures Ohio's character — its resilience, its natural beauty, and its deep sense of community. From the Ohio River Valley to the rolling hills and scenic farmland, Appalachian Ohio remains one of the most distinctive and dynamic parts of our state.

In addition to the federal investments made through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), my administration has prioritized historic, targeted state investments across our 32 Appalachian counties. These efforts are focused on removing barriers to opportunity and supporting projects that help Ohioans work, raise families, and build healthy lives. Investments in infrastructure, broadband access, workforce development, and community revitalization are strengthening communities and laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable growth.

The State of Ohio remains committed to addressing Appalachia's unique challenges while building on its strengths. Our goal is straightforward: to support communities where

all Ohioans have the opportunity to reach their full, God-given potential. We must continue to make strategic, progressive investments that will position Appalachian Ohio for lasting success.

Enclosed is Ohio's 2026 Appalachian Regional Commission Annual Strategy Statement, developed in alignment with Section 5 of the ARC Code. This document outlines Ohio's goals and priorities for the upcoming program year and identifies key focus areas that advance ARC's strategic vision.

Through continued collaboration with local leaders, community organizations, and our partners at the Appalachian Regional Commission, Ohio remains committed to unlocking the full potential of Appalachian Ohio.

Thank you for your continued partnership and shared commitment to the people and communities of this vital region.



Very respectfully yours,

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 2026 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 (LDDs).

The priorities presented are designed to address Appalachian Ohio's unique needs and to improve the region's community, educational, and economic prosperity through the strategic use of 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:



Outlines strategies to address 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 (Governor's Designated Alternate)

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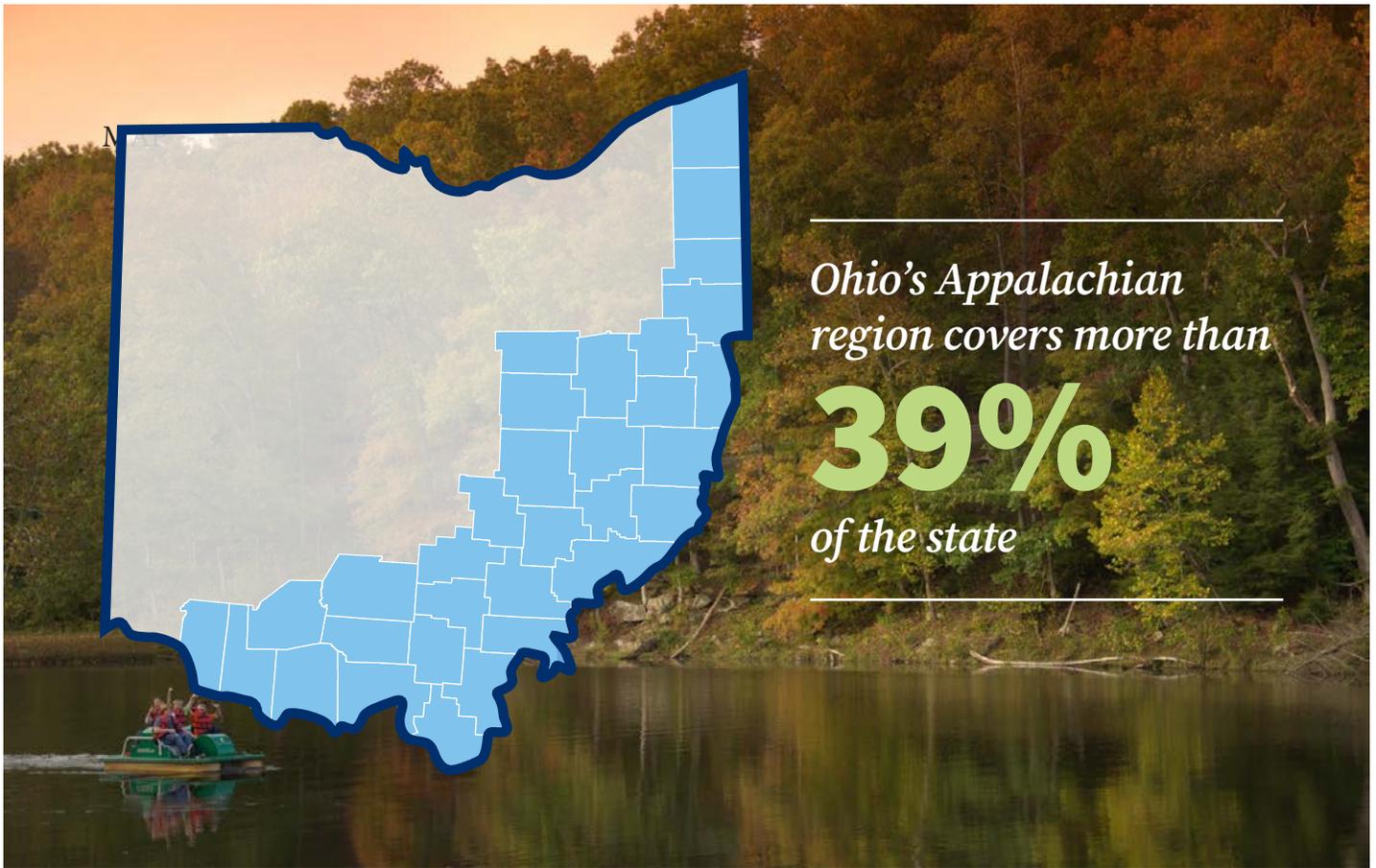
Gwendolyn Cooper
College Intern

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.





Ohio's Appalachian region covers more than

39%

of the state

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 127 people per square mile, 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

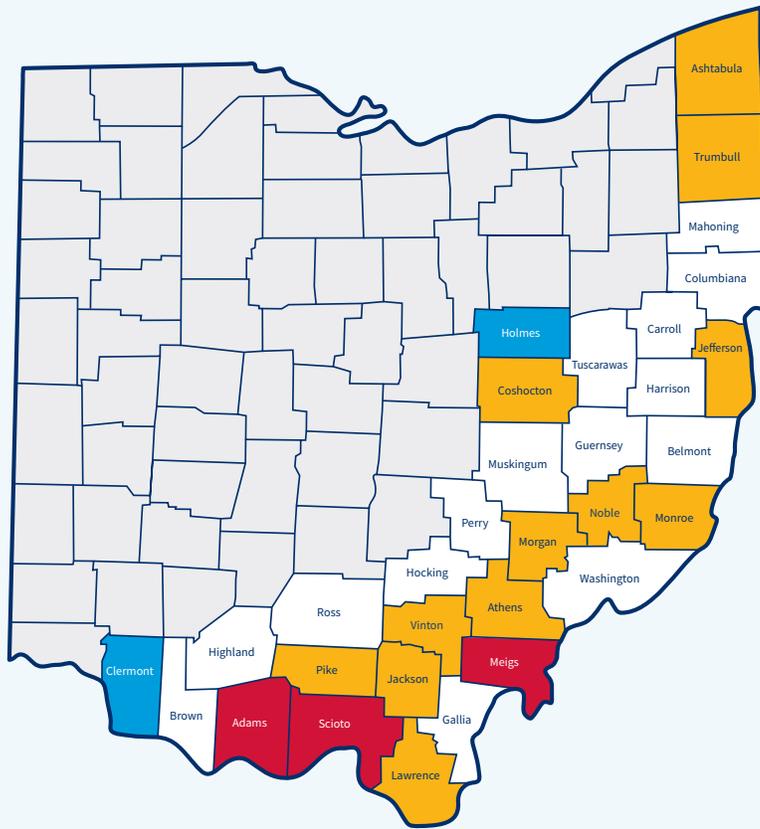


57%
FORESTED LAND



*Appalachian Ohio offers
cultural and natural experiences
unlike anywhere else.*

Ohio's Appalachian counties are home to historic landmarks such as the state's first capital, Chillicothe, and the Rankin House in Ripley. Visitors and residents alike can explore many stunning state parks, such as 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 2022 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the largest Amish populations in the world.



County Economic Status in Appalachian Ohio

Fiscal Year 2026

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

DISTRESSED COUNTIES: ADAMS, MEIGS, AND SCIOTO

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 FY2026, Ohio has three counties classified as distressed: Adams, Meigs, and Scioto.

A common challenge faced by these counties is the lack of reliable broadband access. To address this, the Governor’s Office of Appalachia and BroadbandOhio have developed a comprehensive strategy to maximize 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 will support these initiatives, helping to develop targeted solutions that address critical needs.

To further empower local communities, GOA will collaborate with Local Development Districts 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.



Gov. DeWine and Director Carey join leaders from New Richmond for a ceremonial groundbreaking of the community's reimagined riverfront.

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, the state has made historic investments in water infrastructure through programs like the Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grant Program. These initiatives have 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 will use funding

from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program to expand high-speed internet access. BroadbandOhio, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Appalachia, is ensuring 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 concern. 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, the state has directed resources through ARC's INSPIRE program and other initiatives that focus on recovery, workforce re-entry, and prevention efforts. These programs help to rebuild lives and strengthen the fabric of Appalachian communities.

The region’s natural and cultural assets like 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 focused on large-scale projects that enhance community development, infrastructure, workforce readiness, and healthcare. These strategic investments aimed 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 FY23, 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.

In FY24, award 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

The Appalachian Children’s Health Initiative, led by Nationwide Children’s Hospital and the Appalachian Children Coalition, is transforming access to healthcare for students and communities across the Appalachian region.

The \$64 million initiative, awarded in March 2024, is building and expanding community- and school-based health clinics, launching healthcare-focused workforce development programs, and improving access to vital health services across the region.

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

The funding will support 28 projects, which are expected to impact 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.

As of January 2026, 15 school-based health clinics have officially opened—with more on the way in the coming calendar year. These clinics have already served more than 9,000 students and 4,000 community members, ensuring that our students and residents can get the care they need, when they need it.



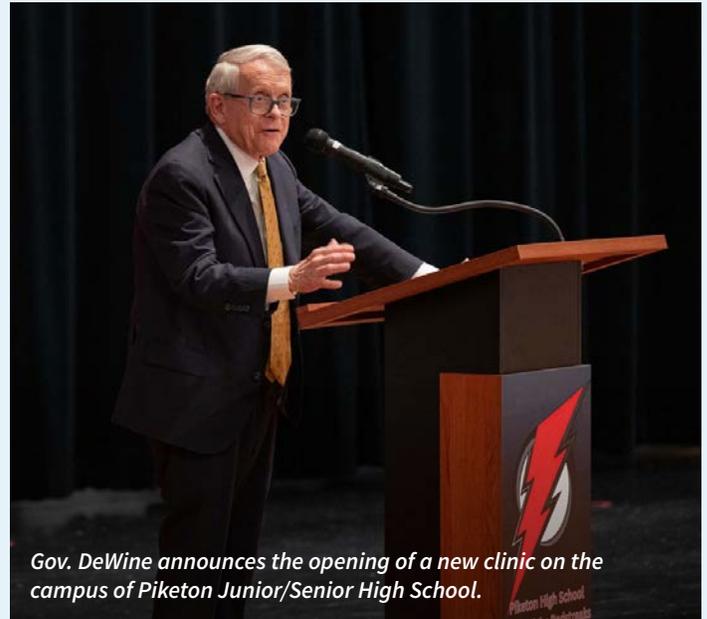
Gov. DeWine speaks to Fairfield Local Elementary School students who will be benefiting from a new health clinic located on the school’s Highland County campus.

SUCCESS STORY

Piketon Jr/Sr High School

One of the first to open, at Scioto Valley Local School District in Piketon serves students and families from five counties: Pike, Scioto, Jackson, Adams, and Ross.

Backed by \$1.7 million in grant funding from the State of Ohio, the district completed a 5,500-square-foot a full-service health center on the campus of the Piketon Junior-Senior High School. In partnership with Valley View Health Centers and the Community Action Committee of Pike County, the clinic offers primary care, behavioral health services, and social support for students, staff, and caregivers—all without leaving campus.



“This new clinic will allow students to get the care they need and get back to learning. When families can access care where their children already learn, we see better attendance, higher classroom performance, and healthier, more confident students who can reach their God-given potential.”

—Gov. Mike DeWine

SUCCESS STORY

Fairfield Local School District

In Highland County, Fairfield Local School District has taken a major step toward improving student health and opportunity with the opening of a new school-based health clinic on its K–12 campus. Backed by \$3.2 million in ACGP grant funding, the clinic was built in partnership with Highland Health Partners to provide primary care, mental health, and behavioral health services for students, staff, and families—both on-site and through telehealth. The new clinic removes longstanding barriers to care for the Leesburg area, helping students—and the greater community—access healthcare without having to travel long distances.

The same grant also funded Fairfield Local’s new Innovation Learning Lab, adding 2,200 square feet of classroom space for workforce development and STEM education. This lab expands the district’s career readiness program, giving students hands-on experience in high-demand fields and preparing them for success after graduation.

“Schools are the heart of our communities. They’re where we come together—whether cheering the home team, celebrating graduations, or sharing a pancake breakfast to raise money for the band or choir,” said Director Mihalik during the groundbreaking ceremony. “We’re expanding that sense of community by bringing vital health services directly to students and their families.”

Downtowns and Destinations

Communities across Appalachia are transforming their main streets and community hubs through the Appalachian Downtowns and Destinations Initiative.



With an investment of \$154 million across 12 counties, communities are focused on revitalizing their historic downtown districts, creating new recreation opportunities, and enhancing the experience for visitors to the region’s cultural sites. Communities are 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 such as Chauncey, Georgetown, Jackson, and Logan are among those benefiting from the initiative.

DOWNTOWNS & DESTINATIONS

\$154M
IN GRANTS

30 PROJECTS

26 COMMUNITIES

12 COUNTIES SERVED

11 HISTORIC SITES

12 TRANSFORMED
DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

SUCCESS STORY

Georgetown

The Village of Georgetown was awarded more than \$8 million to reimagine its historic downtown and elevate one of Ohio’s most significant presidential heritage sites. The investment is transforming the Brown County Courthouse Square through a comprehensive streetscape redesign that realigns four surrounding streets to create a more vibrant, park-like downtown core. New infrastructure will also encourage residents and visitors to spend time downtown and support local businesses.



The project also strengthens Georgetown’s role as a national destination for history and heritage tourism. Structural repairs and site improvements at the U.S. Grant Boyhood Home, Schoolhouse, and Tannery will enhance preservation while improving the visitor experience for tours, school groups, and community programming. A renovated downtown building will serve as a new U.S. Grant Historic Sites Visitor Center, providing expanded exhibits and educational space while acting as a welcoming front door for visitors. Together, these investments link Georgetown’s historic assets with a revitalized downtown—driving tourism, economic activity, and long-term community pride.

Black Horse Inn

In Belmont County, one of Ohio’s most historic landmarks is being reborn. The Black Horse Inn, built in 1807, is among the last remaining inns and taverns along the Old National Road and is believed to have served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Thanks to nearly \$4 million in ACPG funding, restoration efforts are underway to transform this site into the new home of Belmont County’s Underground Railroad Museum, honoring the legacy of its founder, Dr. John Mattox.

The move from Flushing to Morristown—just off I-70—will make the museum more accessible and sustainable for years to come. The project will rehabilitate the inn’s

main floor for museum exhibits, while the basement will house co-working and food-service spaces, and the second floor will be prepared for future revenue-generating uses, such as lodging.

Governor DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine joined local leaders for a lantern-lighting ceremony to mark the start of construction, symbolizing the inn’s historic role as a beacon of safety and freedom.

“When we invest in buildings like the Black Horse Inn, we help turn historic spaces into destinations that people want to visit and experience. That means more tourism, more support for local businesses, and more opportunities for visitors to see what makes Appalachian Ohio so special,” said Governor DeWine.



Gov. DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine join community leaders in Morristown to mark the restoration of the historic Black Horse Inn into a new Underground Railroad Museum.

Wonderful Waterfronts



WONDERFUL WATERFRONTS

\$204M
IN GRANTS

39 PROJECTS

37 COMMUNITIES

20 COUNTIES

25 WATERFRONT
RECREATION PROJECTS

8 DOWNTOWN DISTRICT
TRANSFORMATIONS

5 IMPROVED RECREATION
TRAIL NETWORKS

One of Appalachian Ohio’s key natural resources are the waterways that define the region. From the shores of Lake Erie to the banks of the Ohio River, and everything in between, Appalachian Ohio’s waterways are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

The Wonderful Waterfronts Initiative is investing \$204 million in this natural beauty, transforming local waterways into vibrant destinations for tourists and locals alike. Improvements to the scenic riverfronts not only boost the local economy but also promote outdoor activities such as boating, fishing, and hiking, allowing residents and visitors to fully appreciate and enjoy the region’s stunning landscapes.

The \$204 million was awarded in 2024 to communities in 12 counties. The investment will 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.

“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

Brown and Clermont Counties

Communities along the Ohio River in Brown and Clermont counties are restoring access to their riverfronts, transforming them into places that support community life, celebrate local history, and create new economic opportunities. In 2025, Governor DeWine joined local leaders to break ground on three major projects in Ripley, Higginsport, and New Richmond—investments that turn long-underused riverbanks into walkable, welcoming public spaces that strengthen downtowns, support tourism, and reconnect residents to the river.

In **Ripley**, the nearly \$16.4 million Freedom Landing project is transforming the village’s riverfront into a destination that honors its national significance in the Underground Railroad while supporting year-round community use. The project includes an amphitheater and event lawn, festival space, concessions, public restrooms, and Freedom Plaza, along with improved pedestrian pathways and wayfinding that better link the riverfront to Main Street. Together, these improvements create a more walkable, tourism-friendly environment that supports local businesses while preserving Ripley’s historic legacy.



Ripley

In **Higginsport**, a \$6.3 million investment is redeveloping Slim Sallee Park into a revitalized riverfront asset that restores public access to the Ohio River and expands recreational opportunities. The project features a new fishing pier and overlook, pedestrian walkways, a multi-use event space, updated

restrooms, and an RV campground—creating a space designed to attract visitors, support community gatherings, and serve as a catalyst for economic activity in the village.



Higginsport

In **New Richmond**, nearly \$13.5 million is supporting the Liberty Landing project, which is reshaping the village’s riverfront into a walkable and welcoming destination that highlights both its historic charm and scenic river setting. The project includes a public marina, a boat ramp, an event and gathering space, and streetscape improvements along Front Street that connect downtown directly to the river. These investments position New Richmond as a regional hub for outdoor recreation and tourism while strengthening quality of life for residents.



New Richmond

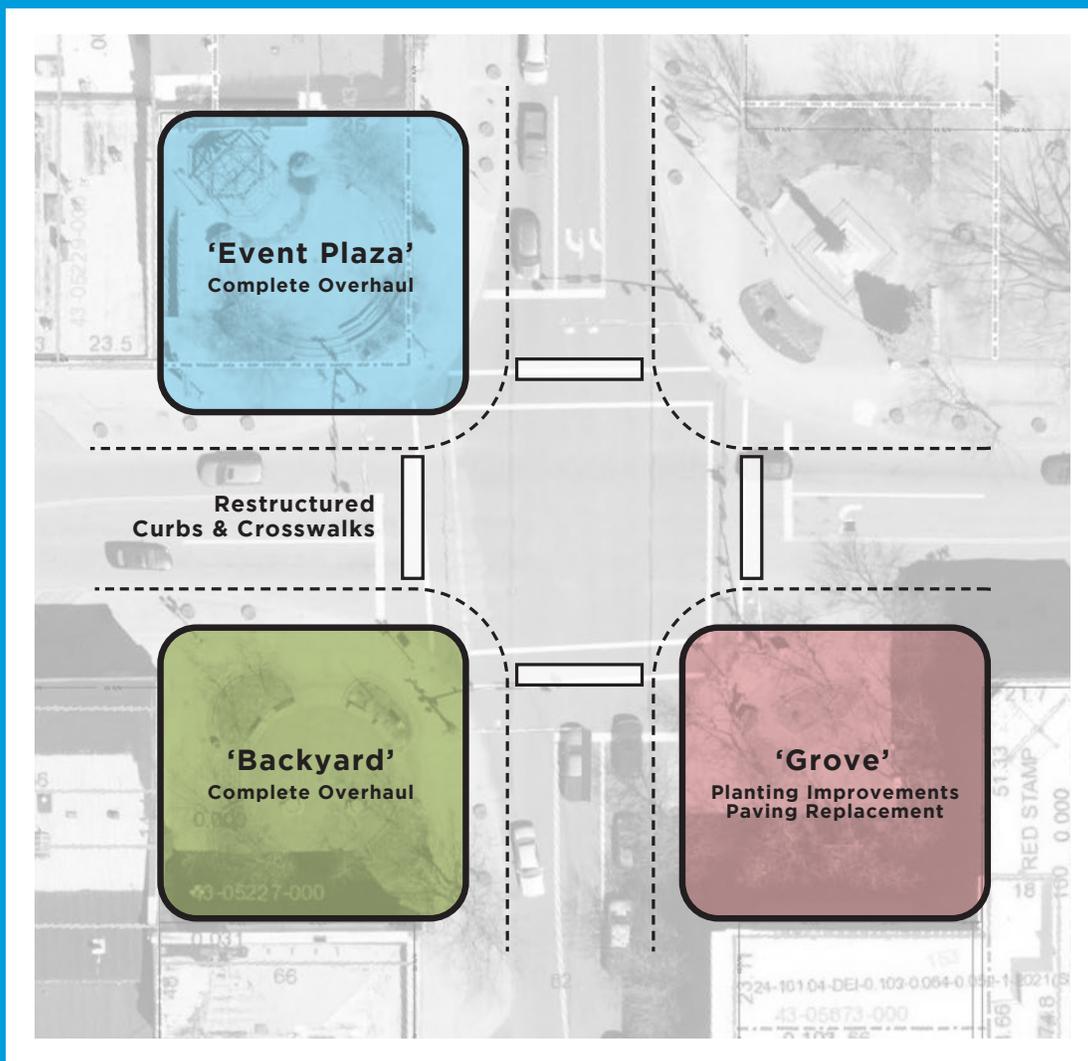
SUCCESS STORY

New Philadelphia

In the heart of Tuscarawas County, New Philadelphia is reimagining its historic downtown square with a \$2.95 million investment through the Appalachian Community Grant Program. This project will transform three quadrants of the square into vibrant community spaces designed for outdoor dining, live music, family-friendly events, and quiet green areas for relaxation.

Two quadrants will become event plazas with flexible seating, swings, and color-changing festival lighting, while the third will feature a grove-like setting with new plantings and improved walkways. Gateway arches will frame the entrances to downtown, creating a stronger sense of identity and welcome.

These improvements will boost walkability, support small businesses, and prepare the city for the future extension of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, which will bring thousands of visitors annually. By revitalizing its downtown, New Philadelphia is creating a destination that celebrates community, encourages tourism, and strengthens local commerce—all while preserving the character of this historic city.



Additional Successes

As many projects across Appalachian Ohio move from planning to completion, the Governor’s Office of Appalachia is celebrating early successes made possible through the Appalachian Community Grant Program.

Among the first to reach completion is the revitalization of historic buildings in Coshocton, Logan, Somerset, and Athens. Through a \$17,674,641 award, the City of Athens’ *At Work in Appalachia* project transformed four key sites—including the Athens Armory, Coshocton Collaborative, Hocking Hills Children’s Museum, and Hocking Hills Chamber—into active community hubs. Two other historic buildings—the Somerset Builders Club, and Logan Theater—are expected to be completed in summer 2026. These spaces are supporting the region with coworking and business incubation, arts and cultural programming, technology initiatives, and expanded access to mental-health services.

The success of projects like *At Work in Appalachia* is rooted in strong local partnerships. Director Carey and the Governor’s Office of Appalachia work closely with community leaders to turn locally driven ideas into lasting investments. Director Carey visits all 32 Appalachian counties each year, building relationships

and identifying opportunities that reflect the unique needs and strengths of each community.

Governor DeWine has directed his cabinet to partner with GOA, fostering connections with state agencies, local officials, and economic development organizations. These partnerships pool resources and expertise to tackle challenges and seize emerging opportunities. Today, GOA is actively working with more than a dozen state agencies on projects that improve infrastructure, expand workforce training, and revitalize communities across the region.



GOA Director
John Carey

These partnerships extend beyond state agencies. GOA works closely with the Mayor’s Partnership for Progress (MPP), a network of mayors and city managers from 21 Appalachian counties. In collaboration with the Ohio University Voinovich School, MPP provides technical assistance and helps communities share resources, identify funding opportunities, and manage local, state, and federal programs.

By fostering a nonpartisan, collaborative environment, MPP ensures that communities across the region can tackle common challenges together—strengthening capacity and driving success for projects that matter most to Appalachian Ohio.



The Coshocton Collaborative opened in 2025 after an extensive renovation.

State Policy Overview of Ohio's Appalachian Development Program

The Governor's Office of Appalachia coordinates with Ohio's four Local Development Districts 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, and to 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 play a central role in advancing economic development across Appalachian Ohio, serving as trusted partners between local communities and the Governor’s Office of Appalachia.

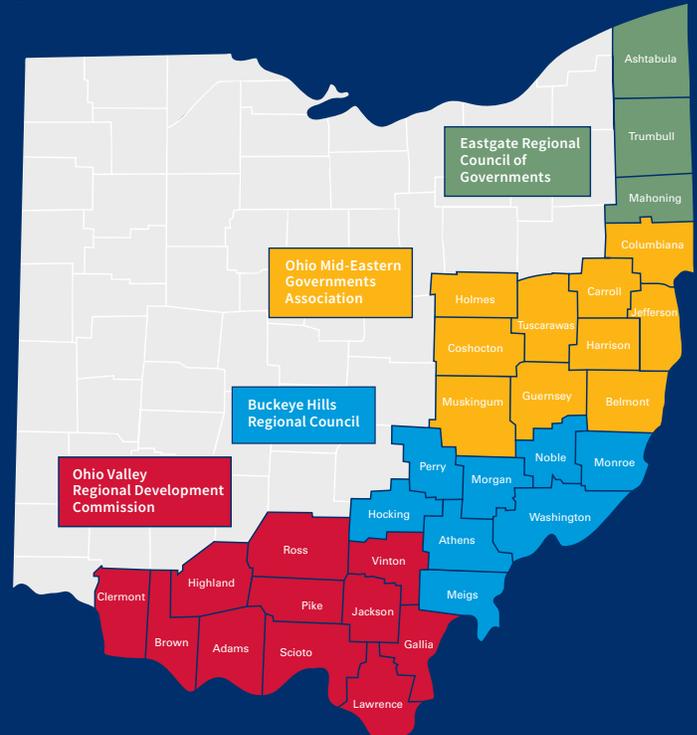
Buckeye Hills Regional Council, Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association, and the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission work directly with local leaders to move projects from concept to reality—ensuring investments are grounded in local priorities and regional needs.

Each LDD collaborates closely with board members, elected officials, and residents to develop economic strategies that reflect the strengths and challenges of their communities. Through a bottom-up approach, districts encourage community engagement and ensure projects are shaped locally rather than imposed from outside the region. Proposed projects are evaluated through a structured scoring process, with additional emphasis placed on supporting counties designated as “distressed” by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Local Development Districts 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 support this work, the Governor’s Office of Appalachia provides ongoing training and technical assistance to LDD staff. Each year, GOA hosts a comprehensive training that includes updates from the Appalachian Regional Commission, in-depth reviews of ARC processes, and guidance on application requirements and platform updates. These sessions help ensure consistency, accountability, and strong project development across all four districts.



Building on this effort, GOA began hosting regional, in-person trainings in 2025, starting with the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission. These visits create opportunities for districts to share best practices, learn from one another’s approaches, and better understand projects beyond their own service areas. This expanded training model reflects GOA’s commitment to collaboration and continuous improvement across the region.

In September 2025, all four Local Development Districts convened in Chillicothe for a two-day statewide training. The first day focused on Ohio’s LDD-driven application model, featured a deep dive into OVRDC’s processes, and included sessions on updated federal guidelines and audit readiness led by Ohio Department of Development auditors. The second day highlighted successful downtown redevelopment efforts in Chillicothe and Ross County, followed by site visits to GOA-supported projects—including a school-based health clinic at Adena Local School District and the UNESCO World Heritage–designated Mound City earthworks—allowing participants to see firsthand the impact of Appalachian investments.

Ohio's Investment Priorities for 2026

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 clear plan to expand connectivity and ensure every Ohioan has access to high-speed internet. In June 2023, Governor DeWine, Senator Jon Husted, who previously served as Ohio's Lieutenant Governor, and Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik announced hundreds of millions of dollars in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program to support statewide internet expansion efforts. BroadbandOhio, a division of the Ohio Department of Development, administers the state's BEAD allocation under the guidance of the 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 designated funds for Ohio's four distressed counties from ARC 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.

By supporting communities in Appalachian Ohio as they work on their critical water and sewer infrastructure systems, we can serve current and attract future Ohio businesses and residents.

2025 INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Pomeroy Water System Upgrades (\$250,000)**
This project was funded as part of a larger effort to upgrade the village's water system, with the goal of resolving persistent water quality issues, reducing boil advisories, and modernizing infrastructure.
- **Crooksville Lift Stations Improvement Project (\$250,000)**
This project involves replacing the two main lift stations within the village's sanitary sewer system. The two stations, which pump all the flow from Crooksville to the joint Crooksville-Roseville Treatment Facility, had been experiencing severe corrosion and infiltration that have shortened their useful life to just one-to-three years. Without these stations, the village cannot provide basic sanitary sewer service to its residents.

- **Portsmouth Emergency Water Distribution Backup Generators Project (\$250,000)**
The project involves the installation of five natural gas emergency back-up generators throughout Scioto County, which will serve approximately 21,000 residents as well as two regional hospitals, manufacturers, restaurants, and other local businesses.
- **Porter Township Stormwater Line Replacement (\$499,200)**
This project involves replacing a 60-inch stormwater tile that serves more than 200 households and 70-plus businesses in the downtown area of Wheelersburg in Porter Township. The defective drainage tile had begun to fail and opened to the ground surface in several locations, creating a dangerous situation for the public and increased the potential for area flooding.
- **Hannibal Wastewater Collection and Treatment System Project (\$500,000)**
This project involves the construction of a new decentralized wastewater collection and treatment system for the Hannibal area of Ohio & Lee Township, eliminating the discharge of sewage from the failing home sewage treatment system.
- **City of Nelsonville Water System Improvements: Phase 3 (\$750,000)**
This project addresses critical infrastructure needs within the city of Nelsonville’s water distribution system by replacing antiquated lead joint waterlines, upgrading undersized lines, and installing valves and fire hydrants to enhance efficiency, reliability, and safety of the system.

Since 2021, the DeWine Administration has committed additional resources to this effort through the OhioBUILDS initiative, which supports water infrastructure improvements, as well as broadband expansion, the demolition of blighted buildings, and more. All OhioBUILDS programs are administered by the Ohio Department of Development, along with support from partners like the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

In fact, as of May 2024, the Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grant (WWIG) Program has awarded 148 projects across the 32 Appalachian counties, totaling more than \$227 million in support. As of January 2026, the Brownfield Remediation and Demolition and Site Revitalization programs have provided Appalachian Ohio a total of more than \$98 million and \$66.3 million in grants, respectively.

SOME RECENT OHIOBUILDS PROJECTS IN THE APPALACHIAN REGION INCLUDE:

- **Village of Stockport Sewer System Upgrades (\$475,000)**
The village was awarded \$475,000 in WWIG funding to replace and upgrade its deteriorating sanitary sewer system trunk line. With no improvements since the 1960s, the defective system was endangering the entire village. Project activities included installing 3,100 feet of 8-inch sewer line, replacing 11 manholes, and 21 service reconnections — benefiting 483 people.
- **Muskingum County Jail Remediation Project (\$2.5 million)**
This project supports the redevelopment of a former industrial site into a new 350-bed, \$79 million Muskingum County Jail. Due to lead contamination, the project includes engineering controls such as site-wide capping, dynamic soil compaction, and clean fill importation. Additional actions include decontamination, site surveys, and plan development to maintain environmental safety throughout the redevelopment.
- **Crooksville Lift Stations Improvement Project (\$2.7 million)**
In addition to \$250,000 in GOA funding awarded in 2025, the village of Crooksville was awarded \$2.7 million in WWIG funding to replace the two main lift stations within the village’s sanitary sewer system. The two stations, which pump all the flow from Crooksville to the joint Crooksville-Roseville Treatment Facility, had been experiencing severe corrosion and infiltration that have shortened their useful life to just one-to-three years. Without these stations, the village cannot provide basic sanitary sewer service to its residents. The project will benefit 2,534 people.

- **JSW Steel Remediation Project (\$2.1 million)**

The Jefferson County Port Authority was awarded \$2.1 million in Brownfield Remediation Program grants to remove approximately 6,200 feet of abandoned coke oven gas line piping and associated hazardous residue at the JSW Steel facility in Mingo Junction.

- **Freeport Sanitary Sewer System Project (\$5.5 million)**

The Harrison County Board of Commissioners was awarded \$5.5 million in WWIG funding to construct a sanitary sewer collection and treatment system in the village of Freeport, benefiting 478 people.

- **Trumbull County Demolition Projects (\$6.2 million)**

Trumbull County was awarded \$6.2 million from the Demolition in Site Revitalization Program in September 2024 to raze 168 blighted and vacant sites throughout the county. Among those projects was the Reeves Building in downtown Warren, which has long been an eyesore and public health and safety risk in the area. The Reeves Building is the last in a series of blighted buildings slated for deconstruction in Warren to make way for new economic development opportunities.

Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Economic growth in Appalachian Ohio is built through collaboration—across industries, communities, and local, state, and federal government. The Department of Development works closely with many types of organizations to attract new companies, support existing employers, and strengthen the talent pipeline those businesses need to succeed. At the same time, the state is investing in entrepreneurship and small businesses—recognizing their role in job creation, downtown vitality, and long-term economic success across the region.

That coordinated strategy is driving innovation across the region. The Ohio Innovation Hubs program is positioning Ohio as a national leader by building on existing industry strengths and research expertise. In February 2025, the state invested \$26 million in the Youngstown Innovation Hub for Aerospace and Defense, bringing together government, academia, and private industry to advance additive manufacturing and defense technologies. Appalachian communities are also laying the groundwork for future hubs, with planning grants awarded to the Athens-based CARBON Hub, focused on sustainable carbon-based materials, and the Piketon/Appalachian Nuclear & Advanced Energy Hub, which is advancing next-generation energy and manufacturing opportunities. In January 2026, the U.S. Department of Energy announced a \$900 million award to expand uranium enrichment in Piketon. The funding builds on the state’s investment and will help transform Ohio into a leader in the advanced nuclear industry.



Preparing communities for future investment requires project-ready sites and infrastructure. Through the All Ohio Future Fund, the state is helping Appalachian communities prepare sites for the next generation of employers by investing in planning, utilities, and site preparation. These projects are strengthening local capacity, reducing barriers to development, and positioning communities to compete for transformational opportunities when companies are ready to invest. Projects were approved in February 2025 in Muskingum County (\$3.6 million), Guernsey County (\$1.4 million), and Gallia County (\$1 million), and in July 2025 in Coshocton County (\$58.7 million), and Muskingum County (\$20.7 million).

SUCCESS STORY

Kimberly-Clark Advanced Manufacturing Facility

In May 2025, Kimberly-Clark Corporation announced plans to establish an \$800 million advanced manufacturing facility in Trumbull County, bringing 491 new jobs to the region. One of the world's leading manufacturers of personal care and hygiene products, Kimberly-Clark selected Warren for its first Ohio facility, marking a significant expansion of the company's U.S. manufacturing footprint.

Kimberly-Clark will benefit from the region's access to talent, infrastructure, and proximity to more than 117 million consumers across the Northeast and Midwest. The project was supported through a combination of state and local incentives, including funding from the All Ohio Future Fund for the development of the site. The facility will serve as a strategic production hub while delivering long-term economic opportunity for Northeast Ohio and the Appalachian region.



Rendering of new Kimberly-Clark facility in Trumbull County

SUCCESS STORY

Spin Cycle Solutions

Michael Miller built SpinCycle Solutions to take the hassle out of laundry—and in the process, created a growing business rooted in service and opportunity. When the U.S. Army veteran looked to expand his laundromat business, he connected with his local Minority Business Assistance Center for guidance and support.

Through the Ohio Department of Development, Miller's business was certified as a Veteran-Friendly Business Enterprise, opening the door to new resources and growth opportunities. With that support, SpinCycle Solutions expanded beyond its original footprint and now operates locations in both Akron and Youngstown—demonstrating how targeted assistance can help entrepreneurs grow sustainable businesses while serving their communities.

Supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners is central to building resilient communities across Appalachian Ohio. Through the Ohio Department of Development, the state provides a statewide network of technical assistance, financing, and business counseling that helps entrepreneurs start, grow, and expand their businesses. These resources strengthen operations, open new markets, and support job creation—ensuring small businesses, which are often the backbone of Appalachian communities, have the tools they need to have the tools they need to grow, create jobs, and create opportunity close to home.



Michael Miller



Old Fort Steuben in Steubenville

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. In 2023, Appalachian Ohio counties generated over \$6 billion of the state's total visitor spending and over \$502 million in state and local taxes. Additionally, the region contributed 66,000 tourism supported jobs.

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.

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. Since launch, the campaign has achieved nearly 2,000 page views.

TourismOhio has worked with the Governor's Office of Appalachia to create four Appalachian storytelling blogs that have collectively generated over 17,000 page views. The Appalachian Area of Interest Page has generated nearly 280,000 page views since 2020. Among all the regional pages, the Appalachian page accounted for 14 percent of page views in 2025.

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
- With funding assistance by Ohio's Appalachian Country, produced the economic impact report. 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.

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 nearly \$485 million in 564 projects throughout all of Appalachia. Of this, Ohio has received 74 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.

SUCCESS STORY

At Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, a nearly \$2 million investment through the Appalachian Regional Commission is strengthening the advanced manufacturing workforce across Southern Ohio and Northeast Kentucky. The Shawnee State University Manufacturing Center project is renovating an existing training facility on campus, creating modern space designed to prepare students and workers for careers in high-demand manufacturing fields.

The project also extends beyond the university through Manufacturing on the Move, a K-12 career exploration program developed in partnership with local employers. By connecting students directly with manufacturers and aligning training with real workforce needs, the program helps young people build relevant skills and explore career pathways early. Together, these efforts are expected to serve more than 3,400 students and support 12 businesses across the region, while improving training outcomes for thousands of participants and upgrading 8,700 square feet of workforce training space.

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. In September 2025, ARC awarded a total of \$11 million to 32 projects across the Appalachian region. Of these, Ohio received a little more than \$2 million total for six projects.

SUCCESS STORY

Across Adams, Brown, Pike, and Scioto counties, a \$500,000 investment through the Appalachian Regional Commission is helping individuals in recovery reconnect with the workforce and build stable career pathways. Led by the Community Action Committee of Pike County, the Stronger Futures Initiative strengthens the region's recovery ecosystem by coordinating workforce training with personalized recovery support services.

Building on the existing Transitions program, the initiative provides individualized case management, job training, and employer engagement to support people as they move from recovery to meaningful employment. Through partnerships with local community action organizations and businesses, the project is expected to serve 80 workers and 50 employers—helping participants gain skills, secure employment, and contribute to a stronger, more resilient regional workforce.

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 is a multi-state program focused 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 that impact Ohio, totaling more than \$49 million.

SUCCESS STORY

A \$7.4 million investment through the Appalachian Regional Commission is supporting a new, multi-state approach to outdoor tourism and economic growth across Appalachia. Led by Backroads of Appalachia, the Appalachian Overland Triangle Project brings together partners in Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia to strengthen tourism economies by expanding access to outdoor motorsports and adventure travel experiences.

The project will use GIS technology to identify and evaluate more than 1,000 miles of potential motorsports and overland routes across 74 counties. Investments also include renovating a historic farmhouse into a welcome center and developing an overland training facility with campsite accommodations. By connecting communities across state lines and building on the region's natural assets, the project is positioning Appalachian communities to attract visitors, support local businesses, and create new opportunities tied to outdoor recreation and tourism.

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 program that helps 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 that ARC's program has 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 their STEM camp in 2023. Both camps are funded by GOA to provide a free experience to the student participants and have continued success and growing interest.

ARC Academies and Institute

ALI Program

The Appalachian Leadership Institute (ALI) is a nine-month leadership and economic development program for Appalachians committed to strengthening their communities. The competitive program is capped at 40 fellows per cohort, representing all 13 Appalachian states. Participants engage in immersive learning experiences and regional site visits throughout the program, which concludes with a graduation ceremony in Washington, D.C.

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 state to host an in-state ALI alumni event. Held in Tuscarawas County, the gathering brought together 18 alumni, who also welcomed Ohio's three newly selected 2024–2025 participants into the network. Building on this momentum, the alumni group convened again in Spring 2025. In total, 38 fellows from 13 Appalachian states—three of them from Ohio—graduated from ALI in 2025.



MIKE DEWINE
GOVERNOR OF OHIO



**Department of
Development**