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February 2013

# Community Development Newsletter



Dear Friends,

From Southwest Virginia to the Eastern Shore, each of Virginia's regions has its own distinct character, a rich and complex suite of traits shared across communities. And that unique identity may be a region's most important asset—a building block for retaining residents, attracting businesses and growing entrepreneurs.

Regional economic strategies can serve as launching pads for local investments. In other cases, local efforts scale up to incorporate regional assets into more effective strategies. Either way, the strategic alignment of private and public investments can reinforce the autonomy of the local while creating a critical mass of the region. Something big can happen.

By partnering DHCD resources with those of other state, local, regional and federal partners, the agency supports strategic, coordinated planning at the regional level thereby supporting regional, as well as local, action. These collaborative efforts pursue larger goals that wouldn't be achievable for any community working alone. Investments become more efficient, limited resources go further and outcomes improve.

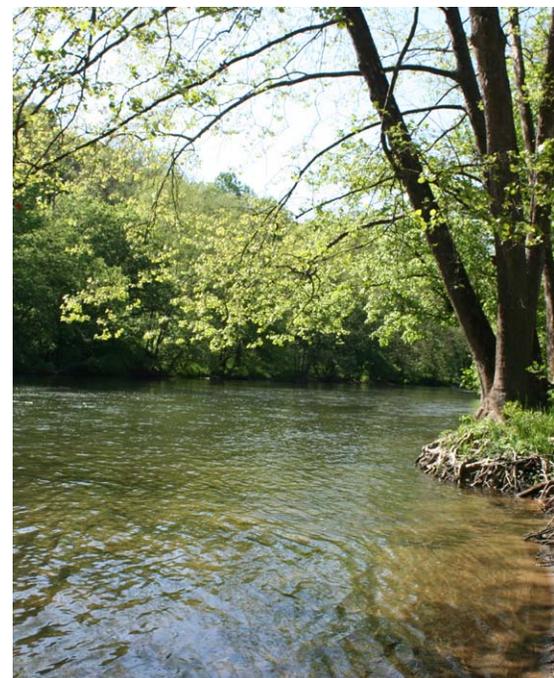
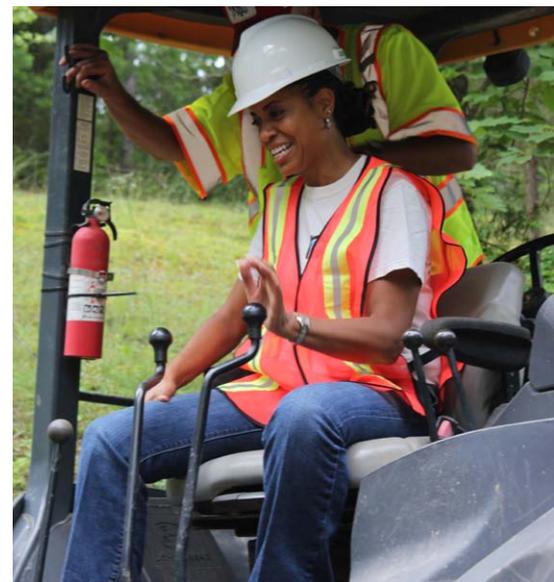
The commonwealth's most exciting community development strategies are collaborative, engage all sectors and even soften the borders between jurisdictions a bit. They reflect the way we live our lives and do business.

Enjoy these snapshots of three regional initiatives underway today, and contact DHCD's Community Development Division to discuss the plans in your region for tomorrow.

Sincerely,

*Lisa A. Cottonson*

Deputy Director  
Community Development Division





# Southern Virginia Leaders Embark on Comprehensive Regional Initiative

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT ATTRACTS INVESTMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Representatives of businesses, governments, agencies and local organizations from the six counties and one city of Virginia's Growth Alliance (formerly TransTech) convened to launch a comprehensive regional community development initiative.

Some members of the crowd, which totaled about 100, have been involved with aspects of the effort for more than a year. Others were in for a surprise. In its first year, the newly-formed regional economic development organization has rallied the resources and investment of nearly a dozen agencies and investors, and they have laid out a plan for a systematic economic assessment and the development of regional strategies.

## Regional efforts attract coordinated agency support

Beginning in October, a broad-based group will work with economic and community development specialists in a data-rich analysis of the region's assets, industrial mix and strategic opportunities. The [Stronger Economies Together \(SET\)](#) process is new to Virginia, who joins 26 other states in working with select regions in the national program. The Northern Neck also was chosen in the competitive process to undertake the effort. In Virginia, SET is coordinated by USDA Rural Development, in conjunction with the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD), Virginia Tourism

Corporation (VTC), Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo).

"We hope this process will help us step back and take an objective look at our region," said Sherry Swinson, Virginia Growth Alliance's executive director. "The timing is right, and we are able to take advantage of the opportunity because of the resources and organizational development support the board received through the Building Collaborative Communities (BCC) grant and because of several ongoing conversations that were already happening at a regional scale."

The Building Collaborative Communities program, administered by DHCD, is another cross-agency initiative, which provides funding and technical assistance for new and emerging regional collaborations. Program partners include the Lieutenant Governor's Office, the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (DBA), VTC, VEDP and the Virginia Community College System.

## The power of regional conversation

Virginia Growth Alliance is just one of the vessels carrying the region forward. In the fall of 2011, two creative economy workshops brought the region together around strategies of investment and entrepreneurship involving the region's natural, community and quality of life assets. Hosted by VTC, the first event, held

in South Hill, highlighted the Southwest Virginia cultural heritage and asked the question of what it would look like to build an economy on the specific Southern Virginia assets that cannot be outsourced. Featured speakers included Dr. Suzanne Morse, author of *Smart Communities*, and came from both within the region and shared examples from across the state and the nation.

On the heels of that meeting, 70 people attended a workshop hosted by DHCD and VTC to identify assets unique to the region. Some of the categories include historic downtowns, natural beauty and outdoor recreation, arts and culture, history and entrepreneurs and successful businesses. [A map of the assets identified to date is available here.](#)

"I'm surprised by the asset list already," said Christine Hasbrouck, owner of Blackstone's Grey Swan Inn Bed and Breakfast. "When you look at them across the counties, they start to form a picture of the region. They tell a story, and I am eager to see where we can take this."

## Aligning resources for action

The big picture of the regional strategy will form over time, shaped by regional data and the input of volunteers and community leaders. To help coordinate the effort, DHCD successfully applied for a USDA-Rural Development Rural Communities Development Initiative (RCDI) Grant. Grant partners, including VTC and Virginia Housing Development Authority

(VHDA) will work with Virginia's Growth Alliance, Virginia's Retreat, Southside PDC, Southside Outreach Group and others. The grant brings \$200,000 in federal funding to a coordinated, project-based community development effort.

"The RCDI grant will help provide real resources in the implementation of the strategies we develop through Stronger Economies Together," said Swinson. "It will make us a lot more comfortable to engage a broad group across the region in thinking through strategies, when we know that we will have some resources in line to help bring them to fruition."

### 21st century economic development is community development

Specific pieces of the RCDI funding will support broad elements of a coordinated development strategy, including a regional leadership development program, ongoing creative economy and asset-based strategies, a rural downtown revitalization initiative, entrepreneur support strategies and exploration of upper story downtown housing potential. It is broad reaching, pulling together a wide variety of efforts that create high-quality places where we can lead meaningful and rewarding lives.

"When we talk about economic development today, we are talking not just about industrial recruitment," Beth Doughty, Roanoke Regional Economic Partnership's executive director and keynote speaker at the August 21 regional gathering titled, *Charting a 21st Century Economy*. "It is about recognizing that people can work from anywhere. It is about recognizing the culture of innovation. It is about recognizing the culture of entrepreneurship and folding all of those pieces into your economic development program. You are busy spinning a lot of plates at one time."

"The world has changed," Doughty continued, "So our approach to economic development had to change. As a newly-forming regional organization, you have a great opportunity to take advantage of these changes."

Learn more about the Southern Virginia efforts at [www.southernvirginia.wordpress.com](http://www.southernvirginia.wordpress.com).



Click on the picture to see excerpts from Roanoke Regional Partnership Executive Director Beth Doughty's keynote talk, delivered at the August 21 event.



*"With the quality and breadth of the farms and producers we have nearby, the Shenandoah Valley is the perfect place to be a chef."*

*- James Harris, Executive Chef of Zynodoo restaurant in Staunton*

## Shenandoah Valley's Fields of Gold

### GROWING A REGIONAL ECONOMY FROM A LONG ESTABLISHED POSITION OF STRENGTH

Agriculture is a longstanding cultural and economic tradition in the Shenandoah Valley. It is so central to the region's identity that it is hard to imagine the valley without it. But is it possible to imagine doing more with it? For the [Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission \(CSPDC\)](#), the answer is yes. Absolutely.

With support from a Community Development Block Grant Planning Grant from DHCD, the PDC has undertaken Fields of Gold, a regional agritourism initiative promoting the abundance of agricultural resources in the Shenandoah Valley. The effort showcases educational and recreational activities for visitors while sustaining local farms and creating jobs, therefore, strengthening the resources it promotes.

The effort, a collaborative multi-county effort, includes Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, Rockingham and Shenandoah counties and the cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton and Waynesboro.

"The grant from DHCD helped us take a big picture approach, inventorying and mapping the region's agricultural assets and analyzing the economic impact of agritourism so that we can start to estimate areas of potential economic growth," said CSPDC Executive Director Bonnie Riedesel. "With a clear picture of the agritourism sites, businesses and experiences our

region offers, we can now begin to collaboratively market the Shenandoah Valley as an agricultural destination and provide support to the farming community and agritourism operators to grow their businesses."

### Supporting local action

The Fields of Gold initiative is a coordination and rallying point for the business owners, governments wanting to support them and residents who identify the region's picturesque agriculture landscape and character as a quality-of-life and tourism asset.

Within each community, specific homegrown strategies can be strengthened through the initiative. For instance, Augusta County and the cities of Staunton and Waynesboro worked with the Artisan Center of Virginia to package agritourism and artisan assets in the [HeART and Soil Trail](#). By connecting these agricultural assets to others beyond the county's lines, an even richer visitor experience can be tailored.

### Connecting farm and town

It is not all about the farm. The region's historic downtowns are natural elements of this strategic effort. With the growing prominence and popularity of farm-to-table restaurants, farmers markets and foodshed awareness, communities such as





Staunton, Harrisonburg and Lexington are evolving as local food hubs, strengthening their longstanding role as cultural and commercial centers. “Downtown isn’t the first thing many people think of when they hear agritourism, but restaurants and markets in historic districts are a critical piece of the effort,” said Riedesel.

James Harris, executive chef of Zynodoa restaurant in Staunton, agrees that the downtown restaurants are a key piece of the agricultural market system. “It means a lot for us at Zynodoa to work directly with the valley’s farmers and producers,” he said. “It is inspiring to buy ingredients from people who truly care about their product. Plus, I can put a face to the ingredients we use. Over time, we have gained a sense of trust in one another. I know they will not send me an inferior product, and they know that I will do my best to honor their food and labor.”

In addition to the asset inventory and economic impact analysis, the effort includes partnership development and public education. On Sept. 11, 2012, the [Center for Rural Virginia](#) presented the Fields of Gold initiative with a Rural Best Practices Award. This award came on the heels of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) Regional Collaboration award announced in August. Recently, the initiative was awarded additional support through a \$60,000 Building Collaborative Communities (BCC) Grant. To learn more about Fields of Gold and how you can get involved, visit [www.cspdc.org/fieldsofgold](http://www.cspdc.org/fieldsofgold) or follow them on [Facebook](#).



## Virginia’s Clinch River Valley

RETHINKING A GLOBAL ASSET AS A REGIONAL ECONOMIC ENGINE

The Clinch River, named by the Nature Conservancy as “the number one hotspot in the U.S for imperilled aquatic species,” is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse waterways in the world. And from the Tazewell County headwaters to the Tennessee border, the communities along Virginia’s stretch of the Clinch take their responsibility seriously.

For some communities, that kind of responsibility could be seen as a constraint, limiting economic development. It has long been contended that environmental stewardship means foregoing economic opportunities. But along the Clinch, an alliance of communities has undertaken a regional initiative that challenges that polarizing conventional wisdom at its core. In short, a healthy river can be an asset in attracting entrepreneurs, new residents and visitors.

This approach is not new. For the past 15 years, the Nature Conservancy has encouraged communities to identify multiple bottom-line benefits of local stewardship to pursue strategies that conserve resources, boost the economy and improve the lives of residents. So, when local, state and regional partners convened at a September 2010 summit on *Building Local Economies in Southwest Virginia*, it was natural that the river flowed to the top of the list of key regional assets that could be built upon. Specifically, the group of more than 60 participants arrived at a consensus on several priorities, including

- Increasing regional collaboration
- Enhancing community assets
- Improving downtowns with outdoor recreation opportunities on the Clinch River
- Establishing a regional collaborative for local food systems planning
- Undertaking cross-sector visioning

### Thinking and acting in terms of systems

The river and its estuaries should naturally prompt thinking in terms of cooperative regional systems. After all, actions upstream in an estuary affect those downstream on the river. But in some cases, the Clinch River does not even show up in the maps rendered to describe the area to visitors.

The river system is regularly overwritten in the community consciousness by other frameworks. Today, we think in terms of roads, county lines, service districts and political alliances. The Clinch River Valley pulls in parts of four counties: Russell, Scott, Tazewell and Wise—and two regional commissions: Lenowisco and Cumberland Plateau. So overcoming those edges and lines, or at least being able to acknowledge another coordinating system, is truly a watershed moment in working toward a new kind of collaboration.

## An economic strategy

Because stewardship of the river requires gentle land use, it invites a particular brand of economic development. Carrying that limitation a step further can turn constraint into an asset and a strategic building block. A nationally and globally important river can be a destination for a particular type of traveler, an ecotourist. With that strategy in place, another important benefit of the cooperative approach emerges. A tourist is far more likely to visit a well-branded Clinch River Valley than a particular community, especially when the individual communities are working together to provide a rich experience that spans them all.

Creating that rich experience requires forethought, investment and coordination. Travelers need to know they won't get stuck somewhere; they can find river access without trespassing onto private property; their car will be safe at their drop off and pick up points; they are welcome. It depends upon a regionally-established standard of quality.

## Increasing economic opportunities

Job creation is key to the effort. The area's traditional commercial districts can develop as outdoor experience gateways and cultural centers, even environmental education hubs. Entrepreneurial opportunities are arising for dependable guides and outfitters, restaurants and retail establishments. These and other services all depend upon local knowledge, skills and investment. It is a market of local advantage that stresses the Clinch River Valley's unique qualities.

To help local residents identify and tap these opportunities, partners facilitated by the University of Virginia-Wise, including Virginia Tourism Corporation and DHCD have employed a point person to act as a network hub in strengthening an ecosystem of support, encouragement, training and technical assistance, a strategy identified by the region's [Blueprint for Entrepreneurial Growth and Economic Prosperity in Southwest Virginia](#). The blueprint was undertaken by the region with support of the Virginia Coalfield Coalition and Appalachian Ventures and shepherded by the UVA-Wise Office of Economic Development. In addition to building the entrepreneurial ecosystem, it delineates actions that promote an entrepreneurial identity of the region, foster an entrepreneurial mindset in young people, grow existing businesses and support new ventures.

## Building a plan of action

Participating communities and organizations across the four Clinch River Valley counties are assessing the collective potential and the individual strengths of communities along and near the river, such as Dungannon, Honaker, St. Paul, Cleveland, Cedar Bluff and Richlands.

More than 300 people have taken part in one or more of the quarterly meetings, which regularly draw 50 or more people focused on the same vision: (below)

*By 2020, the Clinch River Valley will be a global destination based on its unique biodiversity, natural beauty, cultural attractions and outdoor opportunities. This collaboration will bring measurable economic, environmental and social benefits to the region's communities while protecting the Clinch's globally rare species.*



## The five Clinch River Valley Initiative action teams are working in the following areas to make the vision a reality:

### Goal 1:

Develop a Clinch River State Park.

### Goal 2:

Develop and integrate access points, trails and campgrounds along the Clinch River.

### Goal 3:

Enhance water quality in the Clinch River.

### Goal 4:

Develop and enhance environmental education opportunities for all community members in the Clinch River watershed.

### Goal 5:

Connect and expand downtown revitalization, marketing and entrepreneurial development opportunities in the Clinch River Valley.

Coordinating and maintaining focus on this suite of goals requires dedicated resources, and DHCD provided early financial and staff support for the effort. To ensure that no one bottom line overshadows the others, the group has hired the University of Virginia's Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) with initial funding provided by the USDA Forest Service/ Virginia Department of Forestry and DHCD,

the Blue Moon Fund and the University of Virginia. With support of DHCD, the multifaceted effort was awarded a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

For more information on the Clinch River Valley Initiative, or to learn how you can get involved, visit [www.clinchriverva.com](http://www.clinchriverva.com).



Watch these short video clips to learn more about the stewardship and heritage-based community development strategies being pursued in Clinch River Valley Communities.

[Mountain Heritage Project Coordinator Frank Kilgore on the importance of regional action](#)

[Honaker Town Manager C.H. Wallace on their current downtown Community Development Block Grant and entrepreneurial opportunities](#)

[St. Paul Tomorrow President Lou Wallace on community-based action](#)

[Cedar Bluff Town Manager Jim McGlothlin on the importance of a clean Clinch River](#)

[Crab Orchard Museum Executive Director Charlotte Whitted on the regional story](#)

[Richlands Town Manager Tim Taylor and Mayor Jan White on the importance of the Clinch to the local economy](#)

[Clinch River Valley Initiative volunteer Ernie Roberts on the opportunities in Cleveland](#)

[Scott County Regional Horse Association President Sherry Hilton on the increasingly popular recreational tourism attraction near Dungannon](#)



# Appalachian Spring to Support Development of Key Outdoor Assets

## FOCUS ON OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDS OUT THE SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA STRATEGY

The Clinch River is only one of Southwest Virginia's world-class outdoor assets. Throw in the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Appalachian Trail, the New River, Breaks Interstate Park, the hiking and scenery of the Mount Rogers area and the many sites included in the Jefferson National Forest, and you have a partial list of special places in the 19-county, four-city region that attract visitors from around the globe.

To coordinate stewardship of these treasures, including the development of first-rate visitor experiences and the community monetization of them, the region is undertaking the Appalachian Spring Initiative. On Nov. 13, 2012, more than 150 Southwest Virginia leaders and regional stakeholders gathered at Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway to kick off the idea that, like the Clinch River, these resources can be a springboard for economic development while being conserved and improved.

The initiative is part of the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge funded through the Economic Development

Administration (EDA), the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and via a match from the Virginia Tobacco Commission. It complements the work of Friends of Southwest Virginia, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and their partners in promoting heritage music, handmade craft and local agricultural products and experiences that are authentic, distinctive and alive in the region.

Principle objectives of the initiative include:

- Developing a coalition of outdoor recreation and natural resources entities to develop an aggregated capital improvement plan;
- Developing a database of all economic development outcomes related to this effort, The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, `Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, Heartwood and other asset-based initiatives;



- Providing direct assistance to entrepreneurs and outdoor-recreation-based projects in help with formulation of financing packages to generate private sector investment;
- Facilitating the connection of major branded geographic areas to promote Southwest Virginia as an outdoor recreation and natural resource experience destination, along with the focus already on the region's unique music and craft; and
- Connecting outdoor recreation assets to communities, particularly downtowns, and positioning communities as gateways and base camps for those assets.

For more information on the effort, please contact Todd Christensen at (276) 492-2424 or [todd.christensen@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:todd.christensen@dhcd.virginia.gov).



## Building Collaborative Communities

An important resource supporting fledging regional initiatives in economically-distressed areas has come in the form of 2012 and 2013 Building Collaborative Communities grants. The program promotes regional economic collaboration that stimulates job creation and economic development.

“In its first year, Building Collaborative Communities jumpstarted several regional collaborative efforts across

the commonwealth,” said Governor McDonnell. “The selected projects focus on and facilitate involvement from the private sector, community organizations and various other regional organizations that can make the collaboration a success.”

Building Collaborative Communities is a broad-based program that brings to bear resources from a number of state entities, including the Lieutenant Governor’s Office, Senior Economic Advisor, Department

of Business Assistance, Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Tobacco Commission, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Community College System and other agencies as appropriate. For more information on the Building Collaborative Communities program, visit the [Regions at Work](#) page on the DHCD website.

### Regions were awarded funds for the following projects in 2013:

#### VIRGINIA’S GROWTH ALLIANCE MARKETING

Brunswick, Charlotte, Greensville, Lunenburg and Nottoway counties and city of Emporia **\$20,000.**

#### SPEARHEAD TRAILS ADVENTURE TOURISM PLAYGROUND OF THE EAST

Tazewell, Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, Scott, Wise and Lee counties and city of Norton **\$50,000.**

#### FIELDS OF GOLD INITIATIVE

Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge and Rockingham counties and the cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton and Waynesboro **\$60,000.**

#### VIRGINIA’S GATEWAY REGION INITIATIVE

Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Prince George, Surry and Sussex counties and cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Petersburg **\$45,000.**

#### BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Henry, Patrick and Pittsylvania counties and the cities of Danville and Martinsville **\$50,000.**

# Youth on Board

YOUNG TALENT – ADULT ASSUMPTIONS  
+ GOOD GUIDANCE  
= A NEW COMMUNITY RESOURCE



The following goal is the most common reason given by active community members for their substantial investments in the future of their locality or region, “I want this to be a place my children and grandchildren can remain or come back to.” Given how much it is heard, it is curious that young people are not engaged more frequently in community development efforts.

Young people can meaningfully participate, not just in youth-targeted events, but as full members alongside adults in community activities. And, DHCD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) downtown revitalization process recommends participation of a young person on each project management team. To help build best practices in this area, we are sharing some examples of communities that have recently raised the bar in engaging young people in improving their communities and regions.

- In Richlands, community leaders pulled young people into the development and design of their [Teen Venture](#), a downtown teen center in the old town hall. Strategically developed to attract young people and their parents to the central business district, the facility includes a skate park, a climbing wall, an art center, a garage band space, a slot car track and more. There is even a DJ booth in the lobby. Crews of teens, guided by adult mentors, lead their own activities including community service efforts.
- In Wytheville, high school senior Will Johnson serves as vice-chair of the downtown revitalization management team. The town of Wytheville is

developing economic restructuring and physical improvement plans for their downtown district. And the team is dedicated. Six months into their efforts, they still had 41 lively participants at a recent meeting.

- In Danville, the community explored the power of aligning residents toward meaningful change in their neighborhoods and region through a community reading of Dan and Chip Heath’s book *Switch*. More than 200 high school students joined in, reading copies provided by the local Rotary. Since the event, the Danville Regional Foundation has awarded more than 50 [Make it Happen!](#) grants, including one to the Galileo Magnet School for a youth-led [Happy Healthy Hearts](#) campaign and another for a Youth Action Summit conducted by Cherrystone Missionary Baptist Association.
- In Scott County, low-income, at-risk youth recruited for a summer Information Technology Academy networked classrooms, created mobile apps and got hands-on internships with the Scott County Telephone Co-op and Scott County Public Schools.
- In Nottaway County, the nonprofit [Virginia Museum of Radio Entertainment](#), based at the historic [WSVS 800 AM radio station](#), engages young people in strategically preserving the music history of Southside and Central Virginia to invigorate rural economies. Participating students are mentored in an afterschool program as they present concerts and cultural events with nationally-known artists in rural communities. Producing an entire concert by marketing, managing and presenting the event, students are encouraged to learn and create in a fun and engaging environment. The first of these unique concerts featured young bluegrass phenomenon Sierra Hull. In eight weeks, 43 students produced the tickets, posters, sold sponsorships and worked on marketing for the event. The event sold out in a matter of days, drawing attendees from as far away as New Jersey, with the proceeds from ticket sales going to Lunenburg County Public Schools. This summer, students and others in the region had the opportunity to engage in efforts bringing performances from Lynyrd Skynyrd,

Willie Nelson and Darius Rucker at Hooper Park in Crewe, VA.

So how are young people shaping the future of your community?

Let us know by emailing [Douglas.Jackson@DHCD.Virginia.gov](mailto:Douglas.Jackson@DHCD.Virginia.gov). Or, if you are interested in bringing youth on board in your effort or organization, but are not sure how to start, here are five fast tips and some resources for going deeper.

## Five tips for bringing young people into your effort:

1. Invite young people in pairs. It is harder for anyone to go it alone. And, it makes it tough sometimes to feel you are a sole representative of a particular perspective. No one wants to speak for an entire population group.
2. Count their votes. Do not allow any voices to be unnecessarily marginalized.
3. Do not underestimate young people, their knowledge, intelligence or capacity. But, as with any new participant, go the extra step to provide additional background information. Consider allowing other group members to mentor young members in the early stages of their participation.
4. Watch for subtle cues from adults that they may not be fully welcoming the participation of another generation. Address the situation first with a quiet side conversation with the adult member.
5. Do not expect a young person to fully conform to the organizational culture and norms. There may be some norms that could stand some challenging. It keeps the organization relevant and effective, but be ready to discuss and address small conflicts.

## Resources

### Forum for Youth Investment:

[Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change \(PDF\)](#);  
Pittman, Martin, and Williams

### Sierra Health Foundation:

[Engaging Youth: A How-To Guide for Creating Opportunities for Young People to Participate, Lead and Succeed \(PDF\)](#);  
Paul and Lefkowitz

### Youth on Board:

[www.youthonboard.org](http://www.youthonboard.org)  
(resources for purchase)