

# Maximizing Value: Ensuring Community Benefits For a Federal Appalachian Climate Infrastructure Plan

*For further explanation of these principles and case studies, please see our paper titled “Maximizing Value: Ensuring Community Benefits”*

Transforming Appalachia into a 21st century sustainable economy—one that is good for workers, communities and our health—will require significant federal resources. The ReImagine Appalachia [blueprint](#) proposes driving federal resources into Appalachia for infrastructure improvements.

**Our studies have shown that infrastructure investments could create over half a million jobs in the region. We need those to be good jobs.**

Now is the time to act boldly. We can’t solve centuries old problems with the same approach. Community and labor standards are needed to ensure that those hit first and worst by our nation’s economic struggles can truly benefit and rebuild. ReImagine Appalachia recommends the following principles to guide job creation in the region:

- 1. Maximize creation of good union jobs**
- 2. Target benefits of job creation to impacted workers and communities previously left behind**
- 3. Ensure community benefits**

# Maximize creation of good union jobs

## Project Labor Agreements

Our report recommends Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) for all construction projects receiving more than \$100,000 in federal funds and that have a total project value of at least \$1,000,000. Project Labor Agreements are collective bargaining agreements between unions and contractors for a construction project, lasting the duration of the project. They typically incorporate wage and benefit requirements among other protections that support job quality and the community.

## Bundle Small Projects into Aggregate Contracts

Federal investments can be leveraged to promote the most responsible contractors by bundling smaller projects into larger contracts of at least \$1 million. This is needed because scattered projects or companies--such as reclaiming one abandoned mine site, capping one orphan well, constructing, operating, or maintaining one wind farm or solar array--make them difficult for high wage, high quality, apprenticeship connected contractors to bid on.

## Enable Workers to Form Unions and Bargain Collectively

Developers, organizations, and employers, in exchange for receipt of significant federal subsidies, should agree not to oppose efforts by their workers to form a union. These types of bold policy initiatives will help ensure working people truly benefit from climate infrastructure investments. They also promote job quality within manufacturing, retail and service sector employment. This standard should also apply following project completion (e.g., ongoing operations and maintenance staff at manufacturing or clean energy facilities).

# Target benefits of job creation to impacted workers and communities previously left behind

## Prioritize Communities Impacted by the Downturn of the Fossil Fuel Industry

We must ensure genuine opportunities for coal industry workers and coal communities impacted by global energy shifts. These communities could be defined as census tracts with shuttered coal plants, former steel facilities, abandoned mine lands, and orphaned oil and gas wells.

## Create Targeted Hiring Programs

This can include prioritizing coal industry workers and historically disadvantaged groups residing within a 75-mile radius of a project. Targeted hiring helps ensure that career pathways are paved for women, Black, Indigenous, and other workers of color, as well as formerly incarcerated and justice involved people, into good family sustaining jobs.

## Support Apprenticeship Programs

Apprenticeship programs have a higher graduation rate than community colleges, and allow graduates to build skills towards family supporting jobs without acquiring debt. Federal investments should expand this important model by requiring 20% of work hours be completed by apprentices in registered apprenticeships or locally-based apprenticeship readiness programs, with at least half of those work hours completed by workers from targeted hiring programs.

# Ensure community benefits

## Require Community Benefit Advisory Boards

To set priorities for publicly-funded projects, Community Benefit Advisory Boards should be charged with considering a proposal's emissions reduction benefits as well as health, racial, and social equity impacts of proposed economic projects, ensuring workers have rights on the job, developing hiring pipelines and on-the-job training opportunities. These boards should include representation from labor, community and employers.

## Establish Community Benefit Funds

Major projects should include the reservation of ½ of 1% of project dollars for creation of a small and disadvantaged business assistance shop, to build career paths into construction, ensure community participation and continued improvement of provisions, develop workforce projections, expand buy-local programs, and support local public art.

These programs are an essential tool to break down barriers to employment and access to union apprenticeship by providing income stipends for classroom training, transit passes and/or transportation support, and child care. They are also an important component to support the development of coops, minority business enterprises and entrepreneurship programs.

## Buy Local, Union Made and Sustainable

Requirements to adopt and implement a "Buy American, local, union, and sustainable" purchasing policy are a key component to ensuring that federal investment dollars benefit and build our local economies.

**This moment provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to fund an ambitious Appalachian Climate Infrastructure Program to create a model, modern economy that is good for workers, communities, environment, and health.**

Appalachia doesn't have to choose between adapting to the shifting global energy market and good jobs. We can create jobs by plugging orphan oil and gas wells, reclaiming abandoned mine lands, modernizing the electric grid, creating universal broadband access, growing clean, efficient manufacturing, and updating our transportation system.

Appalachia has all the right ingredients to lead the United States toward economic recovery. Appalachians have a long history of hard work, resilience, and coming together to face enormous challenges. Now is the time to put our ingenuity to use and imagine a 21st century economy that works for us.

