

Overview of Appalachian Sustainable Finance Hub



Tom Croft, the Executive Director of Steel Valley Authority, provided historical context about the formation and evolution of the Appalachian Sustainable Finance Hub. He highlighted its role in addressing economic disparities in the region through sustainable development.

Jen Simon from the Appalachian Regional Commission discussed the funding mechanisms supporting the Hub. She emphasized the importance of aligning federal and state resources with local initiatives to maximize impact.



Project Director Will Bernstein then detailed the Hub's strategic goals, which include enhancing access to finance for sustainable projects, facilitating cross-sector collaboration, and building capacities in local communities to manage and implement sustainable initiatives. He outlined the Hub's focus areas such as renewable energy, efficient building, and transportation electrification. Will stressed the significance of integrated efforts involving various stakeholders from government, private sector, and communities to drive meaningful change in Appalachia.



Relevant Resources



Building a finance hub

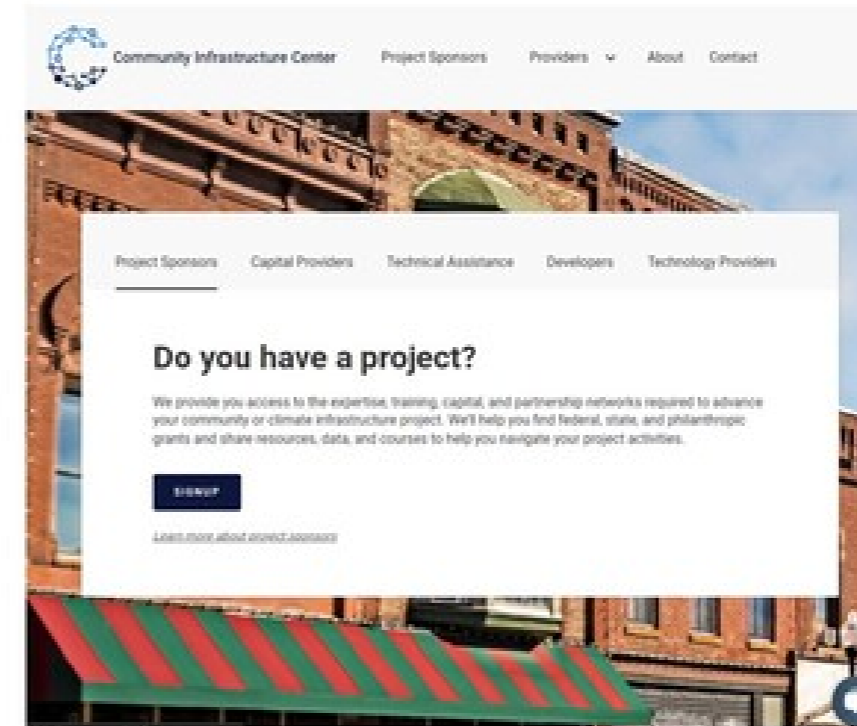
In a 5-state region of Upper Industrial Appalachia that includes Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, ARC has funded the Sustainable Finance Hub planning grant to accelerate sustainable development and renewable energy:

Operating Partners:

- Heartland Capital Strategies
- Community Infrastructure Center
- Keystone Research Center
- Ohio River Valley Institute
- Penn State Sustainability Institute
- Project Development Platform (NECA/IBEW)
- ReImagine Appalachia
- Resilient Cities Catalyst



How to get involved



- Give input to the Hub planning process
- Identify projects
- Offer resources
- Join our events
- Help grow the network



Addressing an identified need

There is an unprecedented opportunity for labor's capital and public investors to co-invest in sustainable infrastructure to simultaneously address the climate emergency and runaway income inequality.

Renewable energy generation
 Micro-grids
 Transportation electrification
 Energy efficient buildings
 Clean energy supply chain and sustainable manufacturing.

- Fill capacity gaps in the region, particularly in smaller rural communities, to effectively use federal resources and leverage private investment.
- Enable project development capacity that can take projects from "shovel-worthy" to "shovel-ready" and encourage more municipalities and anchor institutions to join or replicate good projects at scale
- Connect clean economy and resilient community projects with financing, while creating family-sustaining jobs.



Building a finance hub

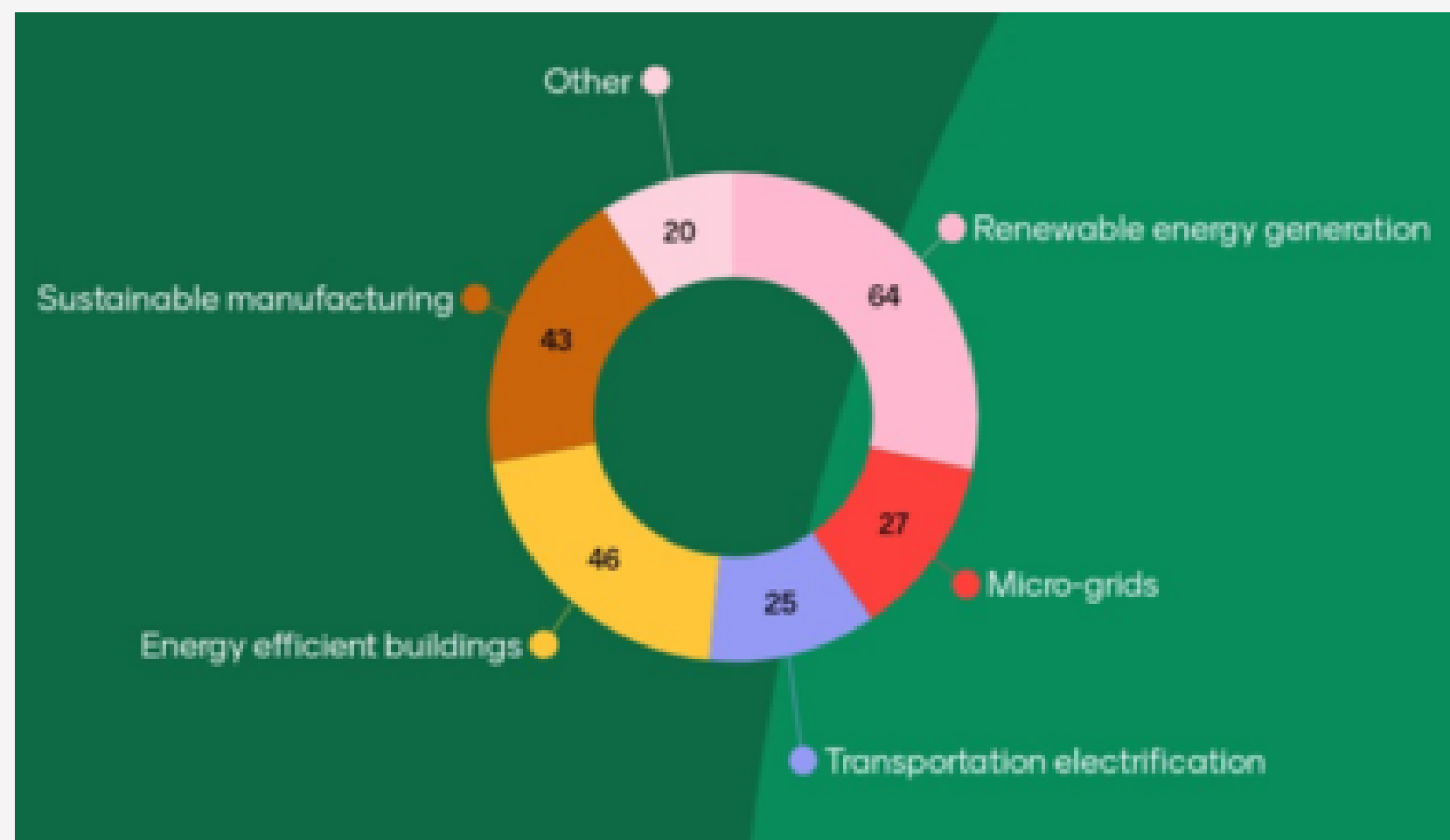
Project Owner Cohort	Industry Cohort	Resource Library
<p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing projects • Capacity and capitalization constraints • Common areas for acceleration of projects <p>Convene</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on urban-rural collaboration • Document and share efforts 	<p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurdles to capital absorption • Preferred project types • Opportunities to leverage federal funding <p>Convene</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment review committee • Pre-development fund exploration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalog of financing sources • Project Labor Agreements • Community Benefit Agreements • Responsible Procurement Agreements • Responsible Contractor Policies • Model RFPs • Joint procurement policies • Mobilize academic/research resources



Feedback

The chat reflected a keen interest in how the Hub plans to integrate local businesses and startups in its initiatives. Participants asked for more information on accessing resources and engaging with the Hub's activities. There was also curiosity about specific examples of projects already underway or planned under the Hub's umbrella.

What projects participants are interested in:



What do participants want from the Hub?



Panel Discussion: Accelerating Sustainable Project Development in Appalachia

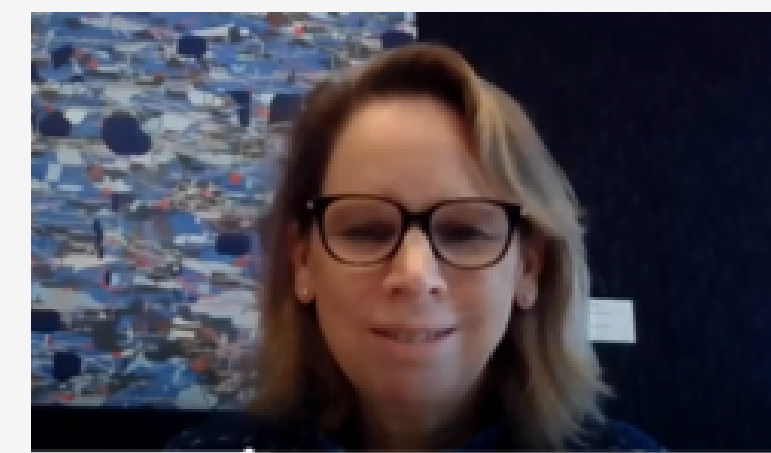


Ed Hill (IBEW) discussed the importance of involving labor in the planning stages of sustainable projects. He highlighted IBEW's commitment to training and preparing the workforce for the demands of new energy technologies.



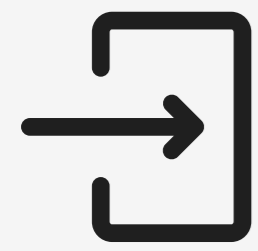
Harpreet Peleg (AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust) talked about leveraging housing investments to create jobs while addressing the housing crisis in environmentally sustainable ways. She explained how green financing structures could be replicated to support similar initiatives across the region.

Pam Porter (Green Bank for Rural America) outlined how community lenders play a critical role in financing projects that might not attract traditional funding. She explained the importance of community-driven projects for sustainable development and how the Green Bank facilitates this financing.




Mayor Patterson (Athens, OH) shared successes from Athens, emphasizing joint funding applications and procurement processes that have enabled significant infrastructure improvements with a focus on sustainability. He cited examples of successful partnerships that led to federal and state funding.

Relevant Resources



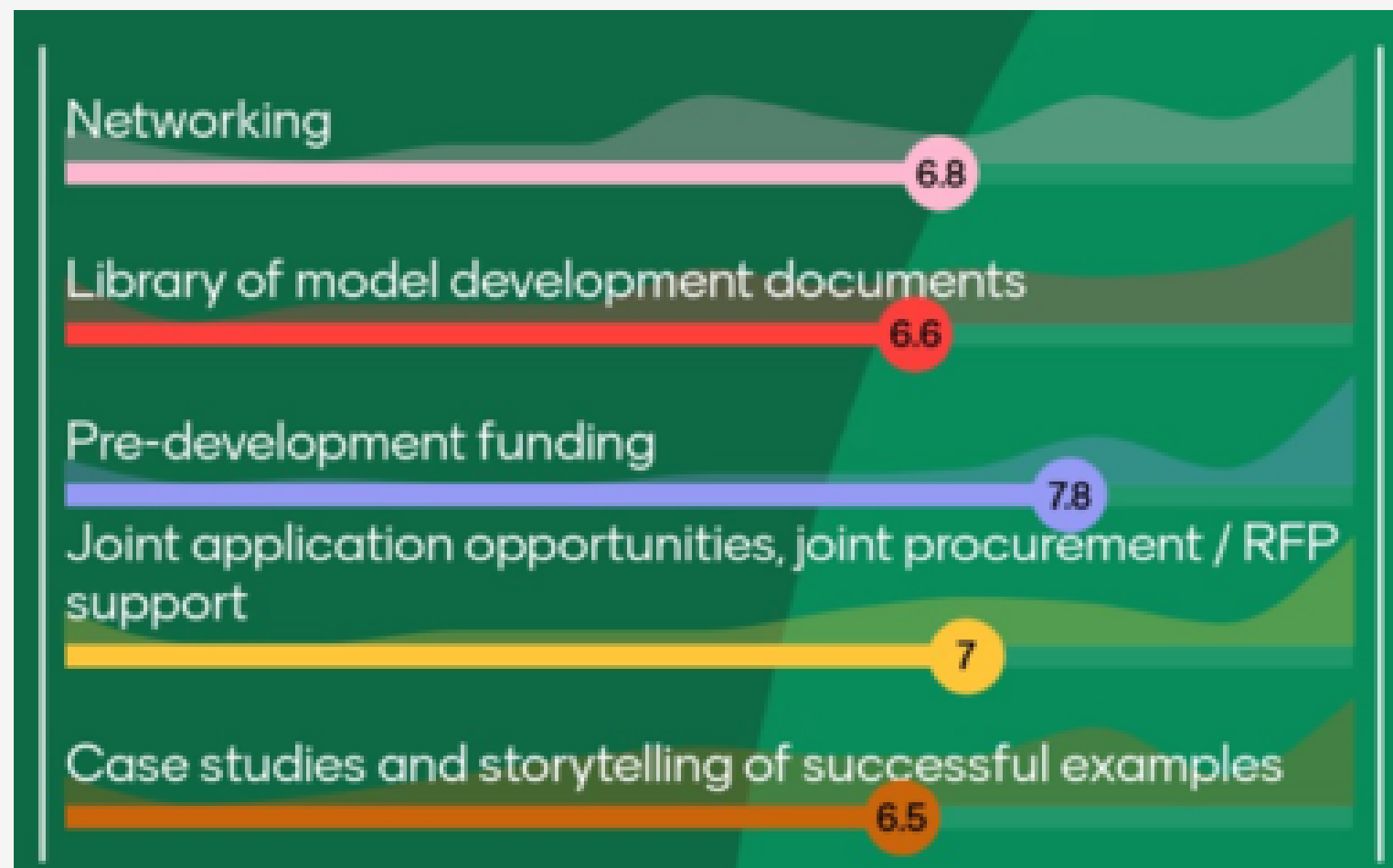
Create an account and join the network to get access to the full panel recording!

 <https://www.communityinfrastructurecenter.org/channel/sustainable-finance-hub>

Feedback

Participants were particularly interested in the collaboration models discussed by Mayor Patterson and asked for guidance on forming similar partnerships in their regions. Queries were raised about specific financing tools and strategies to engage community lenders in project funding. The feedback indicated a strong desire for follow-up sessions focusing on practical implementation tips.

Support participants are seeking:



Participant's vision for Appalachia's sustainable future:



Breakout Room Discussions: Takeaways



Question 1: Obstacles to Successful Project Implementation

Key Themes and Topics:

- **Funding Gaps:** Many participants identified the need for more accessible funding, particularly pre-development and planning grants, to get projects from concept to shovel-ready.
- **Technical Assistance:** There's a lack of technical knowledge and support for project applications, especially in smaller communities.
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Issues like land use planning and permitting processes are significant hurdles.
- **Collaboration and Siloing:** The need for better collaboration across sectors was emphasized, with participants noting that too many organizations work in silos.

Question 2: Crucial Partnerships and Resources

Key Themes and Topics:

- **Educational Support:** Many highlighted the importance of educational institutions in providing training and development to support the workforce needed for sustainable projects.
- **Community and Government Involvement:** The role of local governments and community organizations as essential partners in initiating and supporting projects was frequently mentioned.
- **Financial Instruments:** Innovative financing models like tax incentives, green bonds, and CDFIs were discussed as crucial to making sustainable projects more feasible.

Breakout Room Discussions: Takeaways



Question 3: Organizations to Engage in the Hub

Key Themes and Topics:

- **Diverse Stakeholders:** Participants suggested that a wide range of stakeholders, including local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and labor groups, should be involved.
- **Underrepresented Sectors:** There was a consensus on the need to reach out to and include more grassroots organizations, smaller towns, and rural areas that might lack resources but are crucial for comprehensive regional development.

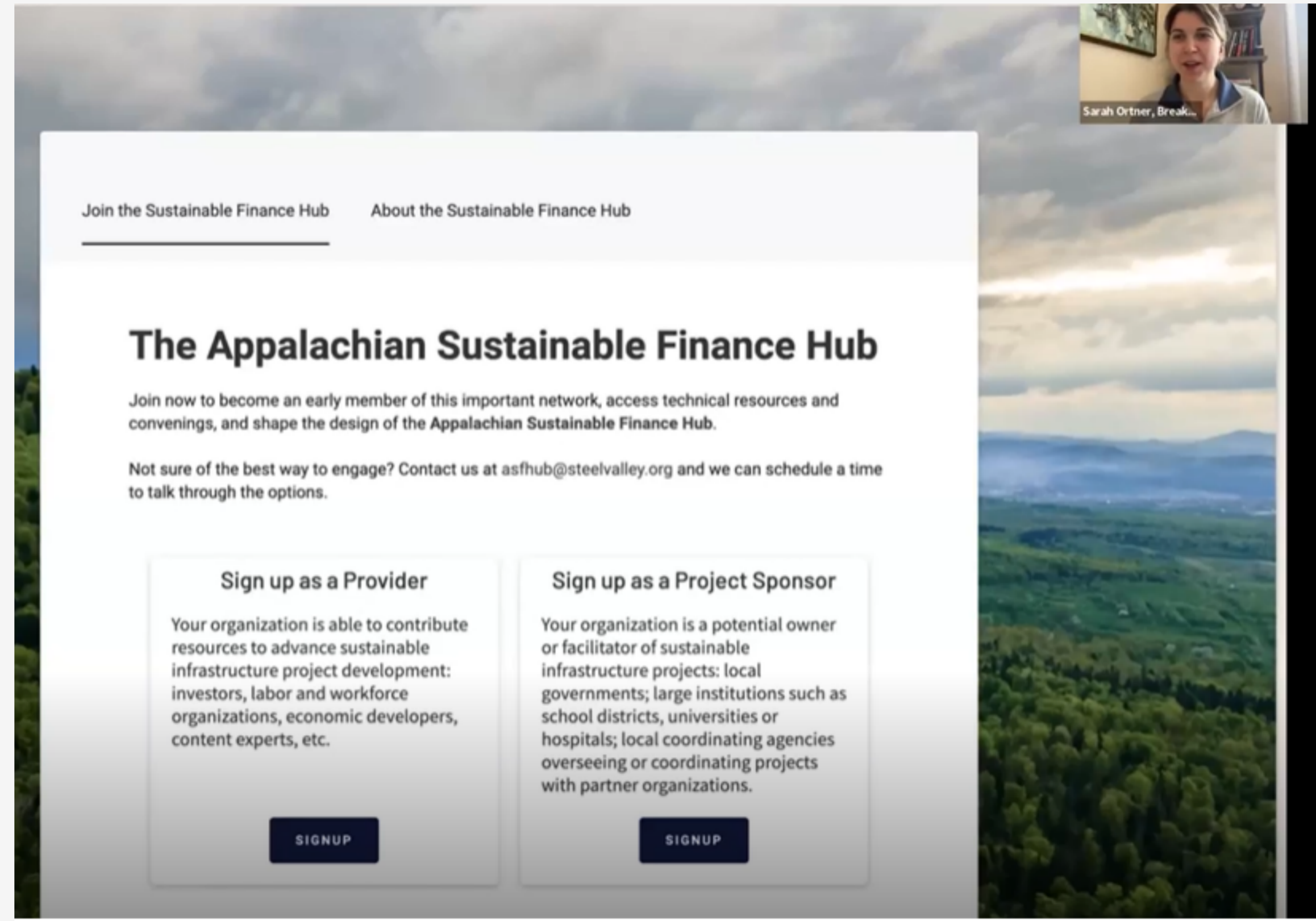
Question 4: Projects That Could Benefit from Support Through the Hub

Key Themes and Topics:

- **Renewable Energy Initiatives:** Many discussed the potential for solar and wind projects, especially on reclaimed lands such as former mining sites.
- **Energy Efficiency Projects:** Several mentioned the importance of projects aimed at making buildings more energy-efficient, which would also help in job creation and economic development.
- **Educational and Community Projects:** Projects involving schools and community centers that focus on sustainability education and training were also seen as beneficial.

Next Steps: Creating an Account on the Community Infrastructure Platform

Sarah Ortner, a senior associate at the Milken Institute and the program manager for the Community Infrastructure Center, introduced the Community Infrastructure Platform. This platform will host the Appalachian Sustainable Finance Hub Channel, serving as a critical tool for ongoing collaboration and resource sharing.



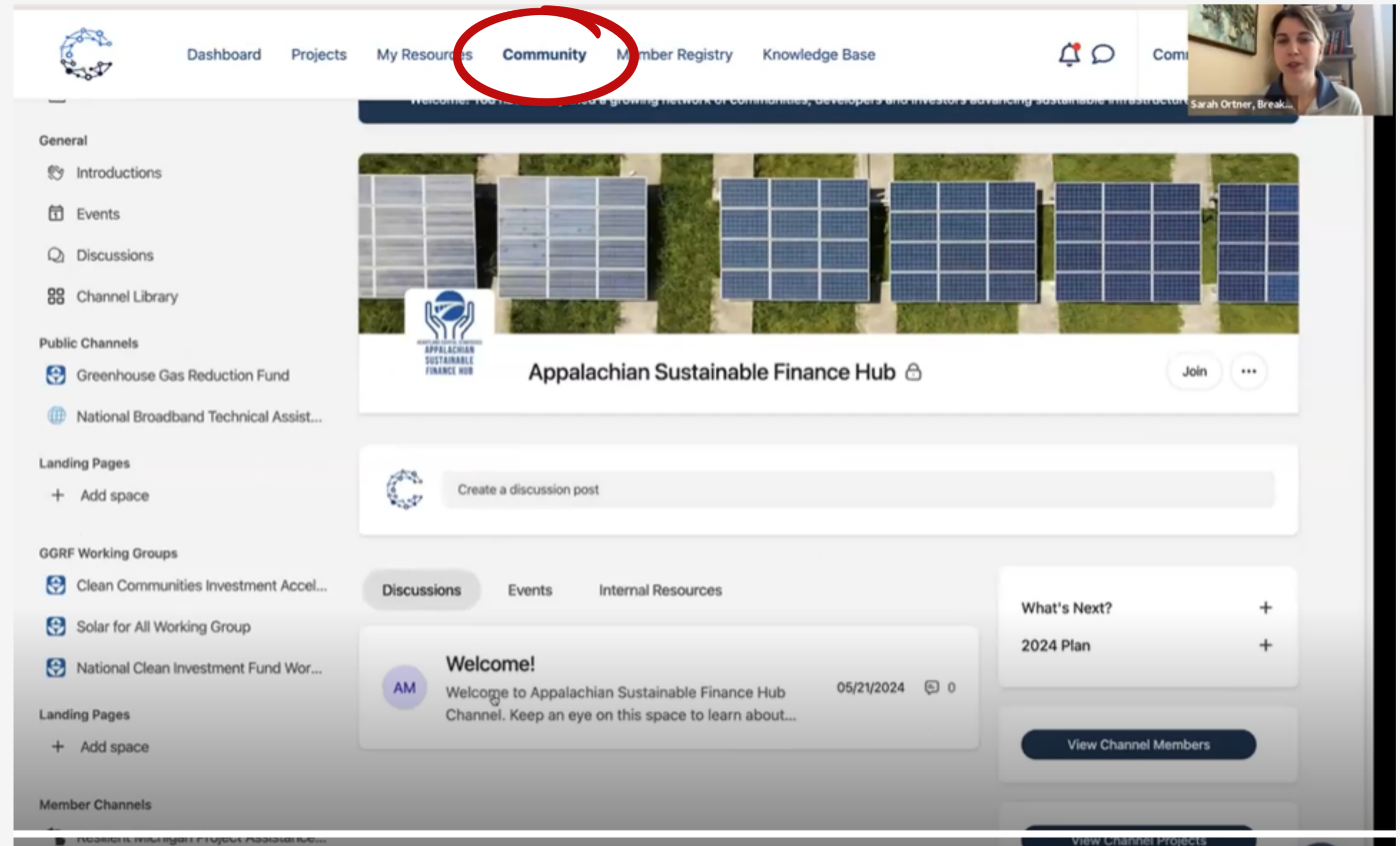
Sarah explained the dual roles individuals could assume on the platform: either as a "**provider**" or a "**project sponsor**." Providers offer resources or financing to help advance sustainable infrastructure projects, such as investors, labor organizations, economic developers, grant writers, and technical assistance providers. Project sponsors are those with a sustainable infrastructure project, like local governments, educational institutions, or health facilities.

Next Steps: Creating an Account on the Community Infrastructure Platform

Key Features of the Platform

The platform features include a user dashboard that categorizes participants as either project sponsors or providers. Project sponsors can manage and oversee their projects through "My Projects," while providers can view and connect with projects they are interested in. Users are prompted to provide information about their projects or services during the registration, which helps in appropriately linking resources with needs.

The platform also includes functionalities for creating discussion posts, interacting with other members, registering for events, and accessing recordings from previous sessions



Next Steps: Creating an Account on the Community Infrastructure Platform

This platform is intended to be a central point for all members of the Sustainable Finance Hub to share knowledge, resources, and updates on sustainable development initiatives. To learn more about upcoming events, and how to stay involved in this initiative, create an account:



<https://www.communityinfrastructurecenter.org/channel/sustainable-finance-hub>