The Just Transition Fund is a philanthropic vehicle designed to allow national and regional foundations to invest directly in coal-impacted communities to support the transition to a new, clean energy economy. Created by the Rockefeller Family Fund and the Appalachia Funders Network, the Fund was philanthropy's response to President Obama's Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative, which provides federal funding to help communities adapt to the changing energy landscape. Launched in April 2015 with seed funding from several national foundations, the Just Transition Fund recently completed its second round of grantmaking, providing $460,000 in catalytic funding to support coalfield and power plant communities undergoing transition. To date, the Fund has awarded nearly $1 million to help coal-impacted communities access and leverage federal POWER funds.

BACKGROUND

The United States is in the midst of a historic and rapid energy transformation. Low natural gas prices, tightening clean air and carbon regulations, and the increasing cost competitiveness of renewable energy all contribute to a shift away from coal. Although these changes reflect progress toward a clean energy economy, they have left many coal-impacted regions—particularly communities dependent on coal plants or mines—in a state of transition.

Changes in the coal industry have caused economic uncertainty in Appalachia and the Powder River Basin, the nation's two largest coal-producing regions. Appalachia—the region hardest hit by the shrinking coal industry—has experienced 87 percent of the country's coal
related job loss. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the region lost more than 23,000 jobs between 2011 and 2015 alone, as production plummeted by more than 40 percent to reach its lowest historical levels. In a region long dependent on a single industry and saddled with persistent poverty, community leaders are challenged to build a more diversified, resilient economy.

In the Powder River Basin, a string of coal mining company bankruptcies and changing energy demands have left communities in Wyoming and Montana in distress. The region, which provides 40 percent of our nation’s coal, is beginning to reel as both coal plants and mines close. Job losses are particularly devastating for communities in Wyoming, a state where 1 in 10 are employed in coal related fields. In the coming years, the industry predicts the state could lose upwards of 10,000 coal-related jobs.

Communities where coal plants have closed are also impacted by the energy transition. In the last few years, nearly 40 percent of the U.S. coal fleet has retired. According to the Energy Information Administration, more than 130 coal plants have closed since 2015, with many more retirements expected throughout 2017. Plant closures not only result in direct job loss, but also cause significant reductions in public revenue when plants are removed from local tax rolls. The financial impacts reverberate throughout the community and are devastating to local economies, as reduced local government funding translates to job loss for public employees, decreased school budgets, and service cuts for local residents.

To help these communities adapt to the changing energy landscape and reposition their economies for a prosperous future, the Obama Administration created the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative. The POWER Initiative is an integrated, multi-agency effort to invest federal economic and workforce development resources in communities and regions negatively impacted by changes in the coal economy. Federal agencies awarded the first round of funding in 2015. Building on this success, Congress allocated $65 million for POWER grants for fiscal year 2016.

Designed to help communities negatively impacted by changes in the coal industry and power sector, the grants are available for Appalachian and western communities affected by mine closures and communities facing coal plant retirements.
THE JUST TRANSITION FUND

The POWER Initiative presented philanthropy with an unprecedented opportunity to support communities through the energy transition by leveraging public sector resources. In 2015, the Rockefeller Family Fund (RFF) and the Appalachia Funders Network (AFN) launched the Just Transition Fund. Although originally formed to help communities access federal POWER resources, the Just Transition Fund’s broader mandate is to support frontline coalfield and power plant communities across the United States as they transition away from coal toward a sustainable, clean energy economy.

Through its grantmaking programs, annual stakeholder convening, and other shared-learning activities, the Just Transition Fund seeks to:

- Build the capacity of organizations working on transition
- Leverage federal POWER funding
- Foster learning among coal-impacted communities
- Strengthen the emerging, national network of transition advocates
- Create durable support for a new energy economy

In June 2016, the Fund awarded $460,000 to help coalfield and power plant communities access federal POWER Initiative funds. Grants include:
COALFIELD COMMUNITY GRANTS

APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
ABINGDON, VA

Central Appalachian communities, which have been hit the hardest by structural changes in the coal industry, are suffering from high unemployment and persistent poverty. To address these challenges, Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) strives to promote economic development and build a thriving Appalachia by expanding local food economies and improving food access and distribution. Support from the Just Transition Fund will enable ASD to create a regional food enterprise corridor and target more than 40 counties that the Appalachian Regional Commission classifies as distressed. The initiative will grow the local food industry, including agricultural production, food processing, and the forest botanical sector, across the region. ASD and its partner, the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks, hope to bolster economic opportunities for displaced workers and low-wealth entrepreneurs, improve education and support services, and create a food distribution model throughout Central Appalachia.

APPALACHIAN VOICES
BOONE, NC

Appalachian Voices is pursuing strategies to develop a robust clean energy sector and stimulate sustainable economic growth in Southwest Virginia communities, which have been impacted by a 60 percent drop, on average, in coal mining jobs since 2012. In order to promote solar energy in ways that maximize local economic benefits, Appalachian Voices will convene a group of expert stakeholders to create a regional roadmap for renewable energy development. Comprised of local economic development authorities, planning district commissions, businesses, and other community-based organizations, the stakeholder group will assess the region’s needs and elevate energy and economic solutions.

APPALSHOP, INC.
WHITESBURG, KY

Appalshop is committed to alleviating poverty and diversifying Appalachia’s economy by investing in the region’s arts and cultural assets. By engaging partners and expanding opportunities, Appalshop will help foster entrepreneurialism in economically distressed areas, create a creative economy cluster in southeastern Kentucky, and build upon its training and leadership development programs. Support from the Just Transition Fund will serve as a match for Appalshop’s 2016 POWER proposal to the Appalachian Regional Commission. In 2015, the organization received a POWER grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission to support its partnership with the Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College to provide an immersive certificate program in technology and media skills. Appalshop has the distinction of being the only arts organization to receive federal POWER funds.

COALFIELD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
WAYNE, WV

Operating in the southern West Virginia counties of McDowell, Mingo, Wayne, and Lincoln, the Coalfield Development Corporation (Coalfield) works to break the generational cycle of poverty in the region through the development of social enterprises. Green-collar construction, sustainable agriculture, artisan trades, and renewable energy are cornerstones of the organization’s work. Coalfield received a 2015 POWER grant and is working collaboratively on additional POWER proposals to foster social enterprise and replicate its workforce development and social enterprise models in other coal impacted communities. The Just Transition Fund’s 2016 grant will support Coalfield’s organizational capacity to scale and expand its impact.

FEDERATION OF APPALACHIAN HOUSING ENTERPRISES (FAHE)
BEREA, KY

Fahe is on a mission to eliminate persistent poverty in Appalachia. The organization’s unique collaborative model connects a network of local, regional, and national leaders to create transformational change in the region. With its partners, Fahe facilitates the production of higher quality homes, generates construction jobs, and creates better housing options that are safe, affordable, and energy efficient. In partnership with three locally-rooted member nonprofits, which serve six Kentucky coalfield counties, Fahe seeks to create immediate employment opportunities for unemployed members of the coal-impacted workforce while addressing the dearth of quality housing. Fahe’s long-term goal is to expand a pilot energy efficiency program that will create sustainable revenue streams for its member nonprofits; create jobs for local
contractors, technicians, and suppliers; and increase
the local tax base. Support from the Just Transition
Fund will enable Fahe to conduct the research, analysis,
and community engagement needed to further identify
and develop workforce development opportunities for
unemployed coal miners. Fahe seeks to strengthen the
economy of the six coal-impacted communities of Eastern
Kentucky and help generate needed energy efficient
housing demand and production.

GENERATION WEST VIRGINIA
LEWISBURG, WV
Generation West Virginia (GWV) is turning the challenges
facing West Virginia—most notably the decline of the coal
industry—into opportunities. With a focus on attracting,
retaining, and advancing the next generation, the
organization works to make the state a destination for
young talent to live, work, and thrive. GWV seeks to achieve
this vision by creating a network of engaged young people
and providing programming to support emerging leaders
and build the state’s talent pipeline. The organization
works to identify the priorities and motivations of the
next generation and then communicate these needs to
leaders to inform decision making. With the support of
the Just Transition Fund, GWV hopes to deploy its model
for cultivating young talent in eight coal impacted West
Virginia counties and develop an internship program for
current college students and recent graduates.

NATURAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT
FUND, INC.
SHEPHERDSTOWN, WV
Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) helps innovative
entrepreneurs build locally-owned enterprises that create
lasting jobs and community wealth, while using natural
resources responsibly. By providing flexible capital and
advisory services to small businesses in underserved
locations throughout Appalachia, NCIF strives to create
thriving, resilient rural communities with healthy economies
and environments that attract and retain diverse
businesses. The Just Transition Fund grant will support
NCIF to help entrepreneurs develop their enterprises to
take advantage of the economic potential of the largest
off-road trail system east of the Mississippi River. NCIF
and its partner, the Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation
Authority, are engaging a broad range of community
partners to ensure inclusive planning and economic
benefits for low-to-moderate income communities in nine
coal-impacted counties in southern West Virginia.

RURAL ACTION
THE PLAINS, OH
Rural Action promotes social, economic, and environmental
justice in the southeastern and central eastern counties
of Appalachian Ohio. This highly collaborative organization
is engaged in one POWER funded project and at least
three other transition efforts across Central Appalachia
that are in various stages of applying for POWER funds. Rural Action leads an Appalachian Regional Commission
funded effort in seven Ohio counties to develop social
enterprises. In addition, Rural Action is leading the
strategic planning for an eight county regional tourism
initiative, bringing specific expertise around job ladders
for young people in environmental education and
cotourism. Rural Action is also collaborating with the
Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, the West Virginia Hub
and the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky to build local
capacity to create entrepreneurial communities in three
Central Appalachian states. The Just Transition Fund’s
2016 grant to Rural Action will support their organizational
capacity to advance these projects.

UNLIMITED FUTURE
HUNTINGTON, WV
Unlimited Future, Inc. is a not-for-profit microenterprise
development center and business incubator serving
the Ohio River Valley. By providing technical assistance,
education, and access to capital for local entrepreneurs,
Unlimited Future works to help create a thriving
economy that is supported by successful, locally-owned
businesses. In the past few years, the organization has
specifically worked to advance the local food sector in
the region. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture
estimates that agribusinesses have the potential to add
$100 million to the state’s economy. Support from the
Just Transition Fund will enable the organization to expand
market opportunities in the value added meat sector, one
of the state’s most lucrative agricultural enterprises, to
further regional economic diversification in the 20-county
Tri-State region near Huntington, West Virginia. Unlimited
Future’s programs will help provide direct and indirect jobs
in agriculture and value-added food businesses.
POWER PLANT COMMUNITY GRANTS

BLACK MESA WATER COALITION
FLAGSTAFF, AZ
The Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC) engages and serves the Navajo Nation in the Southwest United States. Suffering from persistent poverty, the tribal nation has a 54 percent unemployment rate and an average income of only $7,500 per year. Concerned about the community’s dependence on both coal mines and power plants—and coal’s contribution to the tribe’s economic well-being—the BMWC is actively involved in facilitating community conversations to help build a green economy, support local entrepreneurship, and highlight sustainable economic development opportunities. The Just Transition Fund’s grant supports BMWC’s organizing activity, including community outreach and engagement, in order to help the Navajo Nation build a diversified, resilient economy.

CLEAN AIR COALITION OF WESTERN NEW YORK
BUFFALO, NY
The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York (CACWNY) builds power by supporting grassroots environmental justice and public health community leaders around Buffalo, NY, a city where 31 percent of the population is in poverty. Since 2010, the CACWNY has led the local community to address the impacts of the closure of NRG’s coal-fired Huntley Power Plant. Located in Tonawanda, just outside of Buffalo, the Huntley Plant officially retired in March 2016. When the plant closed, the impacts rippled through the community when the Town of Tonawanda and the local school district lost significant revenue as a result of reduced payments in lieu of taxes from the company. With support from the Just Transition Fund, CACWNY is working to redevelop and clean up the power plant site and create a resident-driven and community-supported plan for economic redevelopment. CACWNY, which has emerged as a national model for power plant communities undergoing transition, recently received a federal POWER award.

CLEVELAND NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRESS
CLEVELAND, OH
Cleveland Neighborhood Progress is a community development intermediary working to revitalize Cleveland’s neighborhoods. The organization focuses on building capacity in the city’s community development system by strengthening neighborhoods and increasing economic opportunities for residents. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and its partners have an opportunity to help shape the redevelopment of the site of the city’s retired Lakeshore Coal Plant. With many nearby community assets, including Lake Erie, schools, businesses, a natural preserve, and premier cultural attractions, the coal plant offers an attractive location with many possibilities. With support from the Just Transition Fund, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress will work with Delta Institute to convene area stakeholders to analyze the site and construct a plan for future use that will promote sustainable economic development.

DELTA INSTITUTE
CHICAGO, IL
Delta Institute works with communities and organizations to build a resilient environment and economy through sustainable solutions. The organization collaborates to help communities transition away from a fossil fuel economy. Since 2012, Delta Institute has helped coal plant communities transform their economies and redevelop shuttered coal plant sites. With support from the Just Transition Fund, Delta Institute provides technical support, additional capacity, and expertise to the Fund’s power plant grantees. The organization serves as a neutral, third party facilitator that understands the landscape, stakeholders, and the economic and environmental issues to help communities navigate a path toward a changed energy landscape. Delta’s expertise includes: planning for job loss; quantifying the tax base change and impact; grant and loan-writing assistance; stakeholder engagement; coal plant land use and reuse planning; and on-site consultation. As a critical resource hub, Delta Institute has emerged as a national resource for coal plant community transition assistance.
NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL
BILLINGS, MT

Based in the Powder River Basin (PRB), the Northern Plains Resource Council works to protect water quality, family farms and ranches, and the region’s unique quality of life. Home to both coal mines and the Colstrip Power Plant, the region’s economy is significantly dependent on coal, as nearly 80 percent of households in the community surrounding Colstrip are employed by coal mining or the power plant. As coal mining declines, Montana's largest coal-producing counties are vulnerable to job losses and the subsequent decrease in tax revenues. Northern Plains sees the challenges associated with the declining coal industry as an opportunity to empower Montana communities to “meet the challenge of change by building a diverse, resilient economy of shared prosperity.” Support from the Just Transition Fund will enable the organization to conduct organizing, communications, outreach, and policy advocacy focused on economic transition.

RURAL ACTION
THE PLAINS, OH

The decline in coal-powered electricity generation in Appalachian Ohio presents an opportunity to foster the growth of large-scale renewable energy generation in the region. Drawing upon its mission of promoting social, economic, and environmental justice, as well as its leadership role in the regional energy dialogue, Rural Action is hosting the Appalachian Ohio Solar Supply-Chain Initiative. By working closely with electric utilities, and leveraging commitments to develop 400 megawatts of solar generation in the region, the initiative seeks to attract component manufacturers and create permanent manufacturing jobs in communities impacted by coal plant closures. Coordinating diverse political, environmental, and economic development interests, the initiative will create training and job opportunities for veterans and displaced coal plant workers. The Just Transition Fund grant will help support the Solar Supply Chain Initiative and will serve as a match for Rural Action's federal POWER application.

For more information about the Just Transition Fund and its upcoming programs, please contact:

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