

## INVEST 606'S ACCELERATE 606 COHORT HOSTS FIRST MEETING



2026 started off strong with the inaugural meeting of the first-ever Accelerate 606 cohort! Made up of six businesses rooted in Appalachian Kentucky, this cohort will work together until April, learning from each other and receiving training from experienced professionals. The Accelerate 606 program is one of Invest 606's brand new tracks, designed for established businesses ready to accelerate their growth. Invest 606 is one of the Foundation's strategic initiatives, created to strengthen small business development in the region.

The businesses chosen for the 2026 Accelerate 606 cohort include: O'Brien's Archery Inc. in Carter County, Kentucky

Mountain Moonshine in Estill County, Authentilead in Laurel County, Sustainable Harvest Farm in Laurel County, The Kentucky Coffee Trail in Lewis County, and Orascom Group in Martin County.

Accelerate 606 is a 10-week business accelerator designed to help growth-stage small businesses in Appalachian Kentucky create and implement a strategic growth plan. Each participant will receive up to \$10,000 in grant funding to help bring their plan to life. Through weekly sessions, mentorship, and expert-led workshops, businesses gain clarity, systems, and confidence to grow sustainably.

"The Accelerate 606 cohort represents exactly why this program exists – ambitious entrepreneurs who are building with intention, resilience, and a real commitment to growth in eastern Kentucky. We're incredibly excited to support this group as they sharpen their ideas, strengthen their businesses, and step into the next phase of their journeys together."

- Jessica Bledsoe, Director of Impact Investing

# ROOTED & RISING

Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky Newsletter

WINTER 2026

## 2026 BRINGS NEW GRANT PARTNERSHIPS

Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky Announces Two Regranting Programs

In January, the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky announced the launch of the Appalachian Kentucky Civic Experiment Grant Program, a new funding opportunity created to support neighbors, organizations, and community leaders who have ideas to strengthen civic life and address local challenges across Appalachian Kentucky. The program awarded a total of \$90,000 in grants to support projects that bring people together, encourage participation, and improve life in their communities. Individual grants ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

"This program is about empowering people closest to the challenges in their communities to test bold, creative ideas that strengthen civic engagement and promote opportunity across Appalachian Kentucky," said Kristin Walker Collins, Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky. "We are especially excited to support projects that reflect our shared values of community, equity, integrity, resilience, and hope."

The Appalachian Kentucky Civic Experiment Grant Program isn't the only new grant opportunity that the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky announced in early 2026, as they also shared the launch of the Thompson Charitable Regranting Program, a new regional grant initiative made possible through a partnership with the Thompson Charitable Foundation. The program will provide \$250,000 in grant funding in 2026 to support nonprofit organizations seeking \$25,000 or less in funding to sustain or grow their work in Bell, Clay, Laurel, and Leslie Counties in Kentucky.

"Communities in Appalachian Kentucky are rich with leadership, commitment, and solutions—but too often lack the flexible funding needed to take action," said Collins. "This partnership with the Thompson Charitable Foundation allows local people to put resources directly into the hands of trusted local organizations that know their communities best. This effort to move decision-making closer to communities is a shared goal between our foundation and the Thompson Charitable Foundation, which is one of the reasons we are so excited about this new program."

Designed to strengthen local capacity and respond to urgent community needs, the Thompson Charitable Regranting Program will invest in nonprofits working across key focus areas including health and human services, education and workforce development, community and economic development, and quality of life.

To learn more about the Foundation's open grant opportunities, visit <https://www.appalachianky.org/grant-opportunities/>.

www.appalachianky.org

Or visit:

SCAN TO DONATE



420 Main Street | Hazard, KY 41701  
 (606) 439 - 1357 | info@appalachianky.org  
 @appalachianky | info@appalachianky.org



Non Profit ORG  
 U.S. Postage Paid  
 Hazard, KY  
 Permit No. 182



## WE ARE GIVERS



On GivingTuesday, we showed the world that, in Appalachia, we are givers. Our communities showed up in support of the Appalachian Kentucky region! Together, we raised a total of:

**\$63,245**

"This was our first GivingTuesday campaign, and it exceeded all our expectations. The dollars raised will help grow the capacity of each of our affiliates to support nonprofits in their communities. We look forward to seeing #GiveAppKY grow more each year."

- Brenna Wallhausser, Chief Philanthropy Officer

Our goal on GivingTuesday was to uplift and strengthen our 12 affiliates serving 20 counties, and that's exactly what we did with your support. Each of our affiliates received donations that will help them continue granting out money to local nonprofits and keep supporting their communities. All of this is only possible thanks to generous givers who love the Appalachian Kentucky region and want to see it thrive! From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your support.

## ANNUAL BOARD RETREAT



The Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky hosted its annual board and staff retreat in November of 2025. Each year, the Foundation's board and staff gather together for a couple of days of fellowship. During this time, they discuss the organization's accomplishments and goals.

At the Foundation, we believe in the importance of connecting our community leaders, and we value growth and change. We are grateful for both our staff and our board, and we host this yearly retreat as a way to thank them for their dedication to making a positive difference in the Appalachian Kentucky region!

## AFFILIATE HIGHLIGHTS

Our affiliate community foundations have been hard at work!



Breathitt County Community Foundation recently awarded grants to Breathitt Elementary School for their Readers Make Leaders program, Grayson's Promise to support grieving parents, Breathitt County Farmers Market, and Pilgrim Rest Church.



Leslie County Community Foundation hosted their annual Local Treasurers event on October 2, 2025. It was a successful event celebrating community members doing great work in Leslie County. They also hosted their largest attended Ghost Walk event yet!



Clinton County Community Foundation sponsored Christmas in the Foothills, a Christmas festival with completely free activities for community members. The event was a huge success, and planning has already begun for next year's festival.



Letcher County Community Foundation has opened its spring mini-grant cycle, offering grants up to \$1,000 to support local nonprofits and charitable causes that strengthen the communities. The community foundation also recently awarded \$2,600 to Campbell's Branch Community Center to support their work.



Floyd County Community Foundation recently awarded \$5,000 to Highlands Foundation for a matching grant opportunity to support 10 nonprofit and church food pantries addressing food insecurity in Floyd County.



Perry County Community Foundation recently sponsored Christmas in a Small Town and the Hazardous Studios School of Music Tea Party for kids. They also supported Care Cottage in purchasing Christmas gifts for kids and the disABILITY Resource Center Gala.



Jackson County Community Foundation continues to collaborate with community partners to bring the Jackson County Sculpture Park to life in McKee. Local artist Kellene Turner has completed the park's new mural, which showcases many of the beloved treasures and landmarks located in Jackson County.



Pikeville Community Foundation recently awarded \$144,000 in grants to a total of 17 nonprofit organizations in Pike County to help address food insecurity in the area. These funds were made possible through the Linda Johnson Templeton fund, which was established through Ms. Templeton's generous bequest to PCF.



Johnson County Community Foundation recently launched a fundraiser to give their local Historic SIPP Theatre a well-deserved upgrade. This local theater has existed since 1932, and has been home to countless stories, performers, and unforgettable events. Their goal is to help preserve this landmark for years to come.



Red River Gorge Community Foundation is continuing their "Leave a Trace" campaign this year. With this campaign, they aim to encourage Red River Gorge visitors to share their love for the area by donating to the community foundation, leaving the community even better than they found it.



Knott County Community Foundation recently awarded the Thacker Family Leadership Award to a student at Knott Central High School. The \$1,000 award will support the student's pursuit of further education after graduation!



Upper Cumberland Community Foundation has a new grant opportunity through the Let's Goh Swimming fund. Created to promote water safety and confidence, it makes certified swim instruction possible for adults and children in the region who are economically disadvantaged and who may also live with disabilities.

## 2025 FOUNDATION HIRES



**TAMMY HIGNITE**  
Community Engagement Officer  
Hired in March of 2025

Tammy Hignite brings over 25 years of experience in serving and supporting her community. Before joining the Foundation, she spent 16 years at Primary Care Centers of Eastern Kentucky as the Community Outreach Coordinator. Tammy is proud to call this region home—she loves watching the community grow and thrive, and wants to help it reach its full potential. She and her husband have three children, one grandchild, and two pets.



**KRISTYN DENSMORE-SMITH**  
Lending & Finance Associate  
Hired in October of 2025

Before joining the Foundation, Kristyn Densmore-Smith was the Executive Director of CASA of the Appalachian Mountains, where she advocated for children in the court system who had experienced abuse, neglect, or dependency. Through that work, Kristyn discovered her passion for strengthening and supporting the community she calls home. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her husband and newborn.



**AMY ROSE KARR**  
Community Engagement Officer  
Hired in November of 2025

Amy Rose Karr has a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies with an emphasis in Conflict Resolution from Eastern Kentucky University. She has a background in nonprofit project management and government communication. She is passionate about social justice and strengthening community, particularly in Appalachia. Amy grew up in the Red River Gorge area, and currently resides in London with her husband and children.