6 CAPACITY BUILDING RECOMMENDATIONS

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The goal of the Capacity Building theme is to build organizational and regional capacity to implement the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan. These initiatives build on the regional unity and connections established during the Blue Ridge Rising community engagement e□orts and action plan development, and they include fundraising, sta□ng, sustaining community engagement, and grantmaking.

CAPACITY BUILDING RECOMMENDATIONS

FIRST TIER

- FUNDRAISING TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTION PLAN
- PROGRAM STAFFING
- GATEWAY COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION
- BLUE RIDGE RISING TWO-STATE SUMMIT

SECOND TIER

- ENTREPRENEUR FUNDING
- INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT
- GRANTS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION
- NONPROFIT CAPACITY

ADDITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

- CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

6.1 FUNDRAISING TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTION PLAN

Seek a sustainable stream of funding from a variety of sources to implement the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan, including federal, state, and local agency grants, legislative appropriations, foundations, corporations, and individual donors. Significant funding will be necessary to implement dozens of focused strategies along a 469-mile corridor with 29 counties, more than 9 million acres, and 1.8 million people. Funding will support sta positions to coordinate various projects and programs, consultants to provide subject-area expertise on key strategies, research and data analysis, marketing initiatives, viewshed protection, grant programs, pilot programs, scaling up, and so much more.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Secure funding from a variety of sources to implement the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan for the next three years.

BLUE RIDGE RISING ACTION PLAN FUNDING PARTNERS

The U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Soloviev Foundation, and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation provided the funding necessary to create the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan. Significant leadership gifts from many different sources will drive the next step: implementation. As funding increases, so will results.

KEY STEPS:

- Identify federal grants that are targeted for regional or multi-state initiatives and submit grant applications.
- Engage with elected o cials and community leaders to seek out other federal, state, and local funding sources.
- Cultivate relationships and seek funding from foundations, corporations, organizations, and individuals that have an interest in the Blue Ridge Rising region, economic development, travel and tourism, outdoor recreation, coalition building, natural resource protection, education, and/or capacity building.
- Share results and continue to build the base of supporters for sustainable economic development in the Blue Ridge Parkway corridor.

6.2 PROGRAM STAFFING

Fund and hire Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation staff positions to serve as liaisons between the Foundation, National Park Service, and the gateway communities. Many project participants recognized the basic need for staff to maintain community engagement and communications and to implement the action plan. More detailed staffing suggestions are included in Chapter 7, including the possibility of placing project staff at partner organizations like Friends of Southwest Virginia. For short-term needs that require specific expertise, contracting with relevant professionals may prove more appropriate than hiring staff (e.g., building a website or app, identifying the best locations to site new electric vehicle charging stations).

12-MONTH GOAL:

Fund and hire staff positions at the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and partner organizations to implement the initiatives outlined in the action plan.

KEY STEPS:

- Identify key roles and create job descriptions for desired positions.
- Determine the best placement for each position. Some positions and some duties might best be carried out by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation's partner organizations due to their geographic focus and/or subject-area expertise.
- Secure funding sources for salaries and benefits.
- Advertise jobs, interview prospective candidates, and hire staff to fill the necessary positions.
- Utilize consultants as appropriate to address short-term and very specific project needs.

SIX THEMES OF THE BLUE RIDGE RISING ACTION PLAN

The six themes of the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan provide a logical framework for staffing of the project. Each theme could be coordinated by people with relevant training and expertise, from marketing to coalition building to capacity building and grant program management.

6.3 GATEWAY COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

Seek to include representatives of all gateway communities in the implementation of the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan by forming a Blue Ridge Rising communities committee or action team that is composed of one representative from each Parkway community. Throughout the planning process, the many communities along the Parkway demonstrated a real determination to get involved and be heard, and they want to maintain this involvement and engagement going forward. The committee members will voice the unique needs of their communities, help prioritize and guide projects, foster community partners, and identify appropriate funding sources.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Initiate the Blue Ridge Rising communities committee or action team within the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, with at least one representative from each Parkway community.

KEY STEPS:

- Outline the role, time commitment, and other expectations of committee members (e.g., a committee member "job description").
- Create a nomination/application process for the committee.
- Seek nominations and applications.
- Make selections and begin meetings to review recent results and discuss needs and next steps.

BLUE RIDGE RISING COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

As with the entire Blue Ridge Rising planning process, the proposed Blue Ridge Rising communities committee will encourage regular communication, input, and support from communities throughout the 29-county Blue Ridge Parkway corridor.

6.4 BLUE RIDGE RISING TWO-STATE SUMMIT

Build on the success of the first-ever Blue Ridge Rising Two-State Summit in December 2023 by hosting and facilitating an annual Blue Ridge Rising Summit to continue to cultivate regional unity, foster connections and networking between community leaders from the gateway communities, and share successes and best practices related to the initiatives outlined in the action plan.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Host the second annual Blue Ridge Rising Summit at a Virginia location in 2024.

KEY STEPS:

- Determine the date and location of the 2024 summit.
- Develop themes and content for sessions.
- Create all resources necessary to host the summit (website/webpages, registration, hotel arrangements, agenda, speakers, panels, meals, etc.)
- Hold the summit and evaluate results.

BLUE RIDGE RISING TWO-STATE SUMMIT

In December 2023, 140 community and regional leaders gathered in Blowing Rock, N.C., for the first-ever Blue Ridge Rising Two-State Summit. In surveys afterwards, all respondents strongly agreed (73%) or agreed (27%) that the summit was a good use of their time, and 100% also strongly agreed (58%) or agreed (42%) that the information presented was interesting and useful. 85% were inspired to help implement the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan, and 82% indicated they would attend a second summit in 2024.

6.5 SECOND TIER

ENTREPRENEUR FUNDING

Identify innovative entrepreneurs within gateway communities and help connect them with technical and financial resources to encourage business development to fill existing gaps and build vibrant communities that support and attract visitors and residents to the region.

INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Engage with organizations that provide support, education, and accessibility for underserved populations. Many groups and agencies already have the organization, networks, training, and expertise to engage large groups of underserved people. By developing relationships with these organizations and supporting their e□orts to achieve shared goals, Blue Ridge Rising can more e□ectively engage and serve people who have been – or continue to be – neglected, overlooked, underserved, or excluded. These people also tend to be among the least resilient to economic, environmental, and health-related setbacks; helping them become more resilient helps the whole region become more resilient.

GRANTS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

Provide grants to support outdoor recreation infrastructure projects located in the gateway communities. This work could include grant funding administered by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, as well as funds from partner agencies and organizations, such as the Recreation Trails Program in both Virginia and North Carolina.

NONPROFIT CAPACITY

Develop local nonprofit capacity through grants, in-kind o□ce space, infrastructure, and related activities. Many nonprofits operating within the region support various aspects of the initiatives outlined in the action plan. Collaborating with and providing resources and guidance to relevant nonprofit organizations will help move action plan initiatives forward at both the local and regional levels.

6.6 ADDITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

Provide scholarships or travel assistance for gateway community leaders to attend key trainings and conferences, such as the Blue Ridge Rising Summit and the Outdoor Economy Conference. Having the opportunity to connect with and learn from leaders from other communities helps inspire ideas and nurture collaboration between Parkway communities and throughout the region. Financial assistance would make participation possible for organizations, agencies, and individual community leaders with limited budget resources.