

Committee Sponsored Session – Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Tracks: Activism
 Economic Conditions

Session Title:

Diverse Voices Working for Positive Change in the Mountains: Community Partnerships with Education

Summary:

Sustainable solutions to challenges faced by rural communities require local leadership, engagement, and implementation. Those who live and work in the community understand the needs and culture(s) of their neighbors best. Yet many community-based initiatives that have outstanding track records for positive impact on health, wellbeing, education, and economic development lack key resources that would allow them to attain their full potential. Partnerships with educational institutions can provide critical support, but are effective only if they respond to expressed community need and work within the context of the community.

Joining together in this panel are community leaders and representatives of the institutions that work with them. The goal is to offer practical ways to establish and maintain such partnerships, and to open communication within ASA between scholars and community activists.

I: “Goblins, Gardens, and the Grass Roots: Morehead State University’s Partnership with the Haldeman Community Center”

Presenter: Joy Gritton, Professor of Art History, Morehead State University.

Bio: Joy Gritton teaches art history at Morehead State University and coordinates the MSU Interdisciplinary Appalachian Studies Program and the Eastern Kentucky Arts Project. She is currently completing a book on Allen Eaton.

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Abstract: The seven-year relationship between Morehead State University and the Haldeman Community Center has forged a seamless and collaborative grass roots effort to strengthen a former company town that is working to rebound from the challenges of economic hardship and social degradation. Interdisciplinary, multi-cultural, and intergenerational, this partnership draws on new technologies and old stories, conventional wisdom and innovative problem solving, senior perseverance and youthful exuberance. It is a model that can be expanded, adapted and reworked to capitalize on diverse university resources and to serve a range of community needs-- from social media organizing to health education, preserving local history to raising the next generation of leaders

II. The Eighth Commitment: Berea College and the Communities of Appalachia

Presenter: David Cooke, director, Grow Appalachia at Berea College

Bio: David Cooke is a native of southern West Virginia and holds degrees from Berea College and West Virginia University. Since 2005 he has been the director of the Berea College Appalachian Fund, which issues grants in central Appalachia in the fields of healthcare and education, and since 2008 the director of Grow Appalachia, an outreach program of Berea College's Loyal Jones Appalachian Center.

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Abstract: Berea College, the first interracial and coeducational college in the South, operates under the guidance of eight 'Great Commitments' The eighth of these commitments states that Berea College will 'serve the Appalachian region ...'. Grow Appalachia strives to help as many Appalachian families grow as much of their own food as possible and learn to cook it healthfully, share the surplus with their communities and develop the local food systems in 50 Appalachian counties in five states. The key to the success of Grow Appalachia is the network of partnerships with over 40 rural Appalachian non-profits. Grow Appalachia partner sites meet each family where they live, placing gardens in their back yards wherever possible and providing each family with their specific educational and logistical support. Two communities in Pocohontas County, West Virginia are thriving examples of this project.

III. Unearthing Seeds of Hope: Hindman Settlement School's Partnership with Berea College's Grow Appalachia Program

Presenter: Brett Ratliff, Program Director, Hindman Settlement School

Bio: Brett Ratliff is Program Director for Hindman Settlement School in Hindman, KY. Hindman Settlement School is the oldest rural Settlement School in the country providing education and service opportunities for people in the mountains, while keeping mindful of our heritage. As Program Director, Brett works with the organization's cultural education programs, community outreach, archives, and is coordinator of Knott County's Grow Appalachia program, providing organic gardening information and resources to Knott County families.

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Abstract: Knott County faces a number of intrinsic challenges. There are only two full-service grocery stores in the county, as well as only two full-service restaurants. Adult and child obesity rates are higher than the state average, as are adult rates of diabetes. Many of the health issues facing our people are a direct result of the lack of healthier food options and poor nutrition education. On the other hand, raising a garden is something that families have done in these mountains for generations and knowing how to grow food is necessary for survival to many in our area. Through Hindman Settlement School's partnership with Grow Appalachia, we are able to link those in our community who are more experienced gardeners with those who are just starting out, and all of those that fall in between, and create a network where people can come together, share knowledge, and collectively identify critical issues in our own communities and how best to address them. Since we started with Grow Appalachia at Hindman Settlement School in January, 2014, we have seen an increased awareness of what is in our food; effective, alternative gardening methods; we've helped start two new farmer's markets in our county; and together we have harvested over 25,000lbs of fresh, organic vegetables grown by our participants. This program has also served as a job creator in our community as we continue to expand and deepen our impact.