



  
**APPALACHIAN**  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Serving the Counties of Upstate South Carolina  
Anderson | Cherokee | Greenville | Oconee | Pickens | Spartanburg





# LETTER FROM THE BOARD

**Mike Forrester | Board Chair**

ACOG Board of Directors

Our purpose is to enhance the lives of people living in the six-county South Carolina Appalachian Region. Since our establishment in 1965, we have maintained a commitment to provide quality services to local governments and other service providers in Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg County.

The heart of the organization is its team of board members and staff who are trusted, committed, multi-disciplined, analytical, and solutions-oriented individuals who love the Appalachian Region they serve. We build and foster regional relationships, provide solutions for communities, and fill gaps in staff and administrative resources. The team serves as a regional facilitator, bringing diverse stakeholders to the table to address the most important issues facing the region.

While the global pandemic changed our focus over the past couple years, the Appalachian Council of Governments continues to improve the lives of the region's citizens through economic and community development, transportation, infrastructure development, resource management, senior advocacy, and workforce development. Our programs for the elderly, such as home-delivered

meals, congregate dining, transportation, and counseling, benefit seniors across our region every day. Over the past year, services to the aging expanded greatly to meet challenges presented by COVID-19. Our focus on work skills development ensures people in our region keep up with the ever-changing skill sets required by business and industry. Our focus on economic development through our InfoMentum Economic Development Support System, assistance with grant funding for infrastructure, workforce development programs, and transportation planning, ensures our region is equipped to compete in a global economy.

While our programs are broad and widely varied, they all come back to serving the people of the Upstate. Whether it is general administration, assistance with grants, planning, or economic development support, we want to be a key resource for getting the job done.

We are pleased to provide this Annual Report for the Appalachian Council of Governments, covering our activities and accomplishments in 2021. I hope you find it informative. Thank you for supporting our region.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Forrester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Forrester  
ACOG Board Chair

# ACOG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Mike Forrester | Board Chair**

Monier Abusaft  
Jane Hall  
Ruth Littlejohn  
Representative Steven Long  
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Jack Mabry  
Mildred Tillerson

ACOG Board Member roster as of February 2022

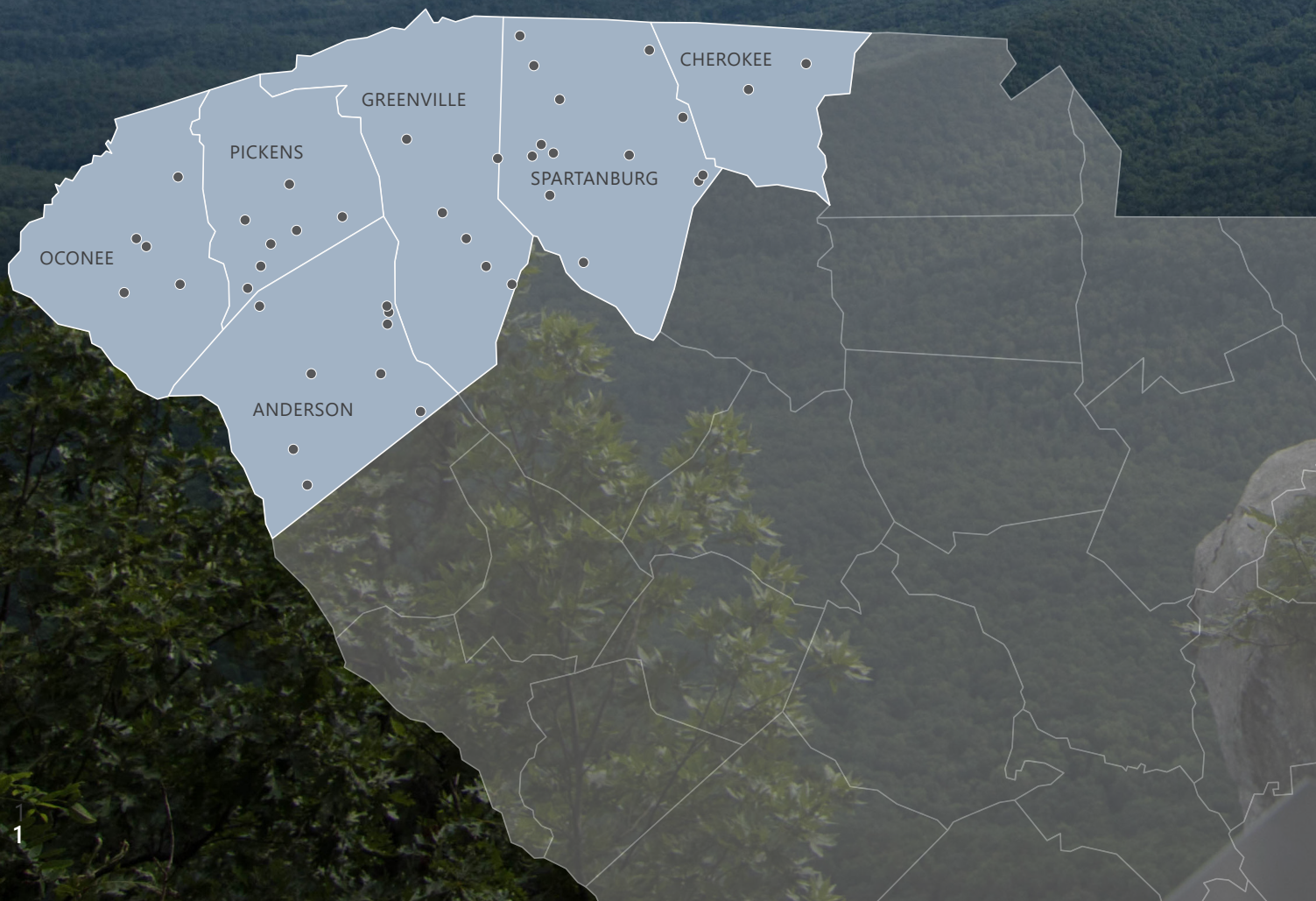
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# ABOUT ACOG

The Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG) was established in 1965 to advise the Governor on the use of Appalachian Regional Commission funds. In 1971, the organization became one of 10 COG districts created by the South Carolina General Assembly. ACOG represents a 6 county area that includes Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg counties in the Appalachian Region of South Carolina.

ACOG operates as a multifaceted service organization for local governments, providing a regional forum where elected officials, industry experts, community leaders, and community members come together to discuss issues and share ideas to solve local challenges. ACOG works in close collaboration with our community partners toward building a competitive economy and promoting healthy, livable communities.





# SERVICES

In carrying out our mission, ACOG convenes elected officials and local practitioners to develop strategies for improving quality of life; prioritizing state and federal investments into social services and public infrastructure throughout the region. We provide comprehensive expertise and resources to support and facilitate a wide variety of programs and services for citizens and leaders.

Funding for ACOG's programs and services comes from a variety of sources, including grants from federal and state agencies, as well as dues from member local governments. In 2021, approximately 75% of ACOG revenue came from federal sources, allowing us to provide many services at reduced or no charge. The total financial return to the region from ACOG programs in 2021 exceeded \$53 million.

## PROGRAM AREAS

The Council of Governments provide services through five program areas and two partner organizations;

Economic Development

Grants Services

Government Services

Planning Services

Senior Advocacy

WorkLink – Workforce Development

Appalachian Development Corporation

56

Years of Service

6

Counties

42

Municipalities

5

Program Areas

42

Employees

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Economic Development Program supports regional community and economic development through professional planning, grant support, and the delivery of InfoMentum, a national award-winning suite of services that includes customized GIS-based tools, web applications, research, and technical support. By providing assistance to communities and organizations in the six ACOG counties and beyond, the Economic Development Program strives to facilitate growth and development, improving the quality of life of our communities throughout the region.

## 2021 Capital Investments in the Region



**69** investments in our region totaling  
**\$1.92 B** and generating **7,678** jobs

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### ANDERSON

Announcements | **12**  
Investment | **\$372.3 M**  
Jobs | **1,143**

### OCONEE

Announcements | **3**  
Investments | **\$11.5 M**  
Jobs | **82**

### CHEROKEE

Announcements | **4**  
Investment | **\$219.6 M**  
Jobs | **545**

### PICKENS

Announcements | **2**  
Investment | **\$4.7 M**  
Jobs | **40**

### GREENVILLE

Announcements | **21**  
Investment | **\$142.3 M**  
Jobs | **1,897**

### SPARTANBURG

Announcements | **27**  
Investment | **\$1.2 B**  
Jobs | **3,971**





## Project Highlight

In 2021, the Appalachian Council of Governments purchased a drone with video and photography capabilities to serve the Economic Development and Planning departments. The COVID-19 pandemic limited travel for domestic and foreign companies, making local site visits a challenge. Above is a still image from the highlight reel the ACOG team produced to showcase the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR). The video has been shown to prospective companies within the Automotive cluster looking to locate in our region.

## InfoMentum

Whether promoting a site, a building, or an entire community, economic developers and strategic planners require timely, accurate, and geography-specific information in a quick and easily accessible format. The GIS-based mapping and data tools of ACOG's InfoMentum Online program give investing organizations a competitive advantage for supporting capital investment, job creation, and overall community enhancement.

**163**

Data Layers Created

**88**

Custom Maps

**1,637**

Data Interactions

**1,429**

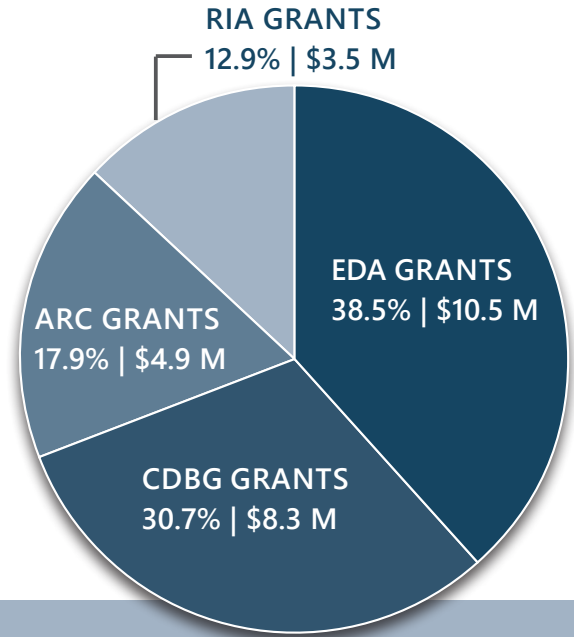
Reports Generated

**148**

Data Requests

# GRANTS

The Grants Services team collaborates with local elected leaders, economic development officials, and state and federal agencies to identify, secure, and administer grant funds for a wide range of community and economic development activities. Staff brings expertise and the capacity to help communities receive grants and assists in building a strong, resilient regional economy. Services include assisting communities with planning and packaging grant applications to address community needs. Staff support includes structuring the application, organizing target area surveys, holding public hearings, and completing the full application. The team also provides grant administration after they are awarded.



## 2021 In Review

**36**

Grant projects facilitated

**46,365**

Residents benefiting

**1,696**

Students and workers trained and educated

**1,593**

Jobs created and retained

**\$500,000**

### Ready Workforce

Increase residents' education, knowledge, and skills

**\$13.2 Million**

### Critical Infrastructure

Improve and develop critical water and wastewater infrastructure

**\$3.3 Million**

### Natural & Cultural Assets

Leverage the economic potential of the region's natural and cultural heritage

**\$8.6 Million**

### Economic Opportunity

Maximize economic opportunities through infrastructure improvements

**\$1.6 Million**

### Community Enrichment

Build a better future for communities through neighborhood revitalization

**\$27.2 Million**

### Total

Improve the region's economy and the quality of life of its residents



Support was provided to communities as they began to move forward from pandemic challenges and restrictions. ACOG worked with several communities to lead councils through goal setting sessions as well as hosting regular meetings of administrators and managers from the region in an effort to help communities find a path forward to prosperity.

## GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The Government Services Program offers technical assistance for local jurisdictions in the areas of personnel, utilities, finance and budgeting, and general administration issues. Services included serving as interim administrator for a community, facilitating staffing searches, and providing training for local government officials. Staff provides a range of services to meet the needs of our communities.

In 2021, when the Town of Pacolet's Administrator stepped down to take another position, staff stepped in as interim administrator and initiated the search for a new administrator. Staff was already providing regular administrative support to the Town which allowed them continue working with ongoing projects without any delays due to the change. This has provided the town leaders the time necessary to conduct a thorough search for a new administrator that fits the needs of the community.

**39**

Attendees at our seven-week Supervisory and Management Training course

**6**

Local governments received administrative services and support

**2**

Communities asked us to facilitate planning retreats and goal setting sessions

**4**

Local governments received training on annexation, leadership, and sexual harassment

**9**

Communities were assisted with staffing searches and budgeting assistance

# PLANNING SERVICES

Planning staff works with local governments on the development of community plans and ordinances, as well as provides administration services and technical assistance. In addition to working with local communities, planning services also focus on multi-county and regional projects. Challenges presented by COVID-19 required staff to adapt interactive planning processes to comply with social distancing and limited in-person meetings. The team was able to shift to virtual and online meeting platforms and successfully continued serving local governments.

**6**  
Comprehensive Plan and zoning updates

**3**  
Served as staff for 3 communities

**148**  
Attendees at planning education and training courses

**\$281,294**  
Invested in 8 homes Rehabilitated through Anderson HOME Consortium

**234**  
Section 208 Water Quality Conformance Reviews

**\$212,026**  
Invested to develop 2 affordable homes



## Transportation Planning

Over the last year, staff worked with the ACOG Transportation Committee to update the region's Transportation Improvement Program, coordinated with SCDOT on the implementation of identified projects, and undertook a Regional Freight Study process to identify longer term investments to improve the area transportation system.

**\$110,000**  
Funding awarded to the region for the purchase of human service transit vehicles

**\$20.1 Million**  
Funding to counties for improvements to local roads and construction of access roads

## Drones Take Flight

In response to the growing interest and applications of drones, ACOG has been exploring possible applications for the use of drones at the local government level. All levels of government have begun to use drones for a wide range of activities from supporting safety inspections to planning applications to environmental assessments. Staff identified a wide variety of possible benefits and during the last year started providing drone services to our local governments and partner agencies.

Projects initiated last year include supporting the Gaffney Comprehensive Plan and aerial assessments

for the SC Highway 11 Corridor Study in Pickens County. In addition, AGOG assisted with Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS) with an aerial survey of the Woodruff Road Parallel Route corridor as part of their ongoing efforts to address congestion issues in the area. As we move forward ACOG intends to grow the program to help with land-use planning, transportation studies, and environmental assessments as well as looking for ways to support economic development efforts in the region.





# SENIOR ADVOCACY

The ACOG serves as the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for the Appalachian Region to advocate for seniors. Senior Advocacy's goal is to empower older adults and adults with physical disabilities to maintain a high quality of life in their homes and communities. Programs provide information and support services that focus on the physical, mental, and relational health of seniors throughout the Region.

Direct assistance includes staff working with the elderly to conduct assessments and determine the level of need for clients. Identified needs are then addressed through partnerships with providers for In-Home and Community Based Services. This includes arranging for group dining and home delivered meals, transportation, home care, and health promotion programs. Primary programs available to seniors are the Information and Referral Assistance, Family Caregiver, Home Care, Long Term Care Ombudsman, Nutrition Programs, and the State Health Insurance Program.

**\$6.32 Million**  
In funding for senior services

**43,578**  
Seniors served

## Nutrition Program

The Nutrition Program and its partners provide nutritionally balanced meals to seniors. The meals are delivered to their homes or served at congregate meal sites.

**334,998**  
Hot, frozen, and shelf-stable meals were delivered to 1,865 seniors

"I'm so bored and lonely here since I'm stuck inside because of the virus. It's just me and the newspaper until you bring the food by and smile at me. Thank you!"

— Senior receiving home delivered meals

**730**

Families received \$870,041 of respite relief from caregiving responsibilities

**417**

Seniors received in-home help

**18,045**

Seniors and caregivers' concerns and questions were answered by our specialists

**5,090**

Seniors advised for Medicare enrollment

**221,400**

Seniors received information on making informed Medicare decisions through 54 events and informational mail-outs

**711**

Cases investigated concerning quality of care issues

**300+**

Volunteer hours spent with long-term care residents in our region's facilities

## Family Caregiver Program

The Family Caregiver Support Program is focused on preventing burn-out and social isolation for caregivers of older adults and seniors raising children through the provision of respite services.

## Home Care Program

The Home Care program connects older adults with caregiver services for everyday activities.

## Information and Referral

Information and Referral Assistance specialists provide information about resources available in the region for challenges faced by seniors and their caregivers.

## State Health Insurance Program

The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) provides up-to-date information on Medicare, supplements, and health insurance to older adults and their caregivers.

## Ombudsman Program

The Ombudsman Program investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting long-term care facility residents. Ombudsman staff advocate for individuals living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. For the safety of residents, investigation of complaints and the resolution process has moved to virtual platforms to keep the line of communication open between residents, their families, facilities, and our staff.

## Volunteer Ombudsman Program

Volunteer Ombudsmen visit facilities and provide a voice for long-term care residents. They provide information about resident rights, observe conditions, and advocate for residents. Visitors at long term care facilities are still prohibited in many of our counties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteers have kept contact with residents by phone, video chat, and personal letters.

# CELEBRATING CAREGIVERS

As everyone has navigated challenges presented by the pandemic, much of the focus has been on protecting our seniors and children. Countless family caregivers have worked tirelessly to power their way through year two of the pandemic with only one goal in mind: keeping their loved one(s) safe. These caregivers are strong and amazing people but they are also tired, lonely, and afraid most days. For these reasons, our Family Caregiver Advocates wanted to find a way to celebrate those who have given so much of themselves the past year. In November, National Family Caregivers Month, staff organized a "Family Caregiver Drive-Thru Event" as a way time to recognize family caregivers, applaud them for all their hard work, and provide them with love and support that is more important now than ever.

ACOG collaborated with over 20 local businesses to create "appreciation bags" for our Family Caregivers filled with "goodies" such as lotion, snacks, sanitizer, a magazine, tissues, pens, notepads, a calendar, and a pill organizer. Our Family Caregiver Advocates set

up tables outside our office in Greenville, where we had warm apple cider and individually wrapped cake awaiting our caregivers when they stopped by to pick up their bag. We also put together a beautiful basket of self-care items to raffle off after the event. Every caregiver who stopped by was included in this raffle. Despite the cold weather, we had a great turnout and it wonderful to see everyone's faces and get to spend a moment showing our appreciation for all they do.

After such a hard year, our caregivers were overjoyed to receive these bags but were even more grateful to see that their community was recognizing their efforts specifically. As a society we often get caught up in focusing on the individuals who require the care and lose sight of the caregivers who are the ones constantly working to ensure their loved one(s) are able to live life to the fullest. Our Family Caregivers are the backbone to the health industry, and as their advocates ACOG will always make it a priority to ensure they understand how important they are.





# LITTLEJOHN COMMUNITY CENTER

Since opening their doors in 1996, The Littlejohn Community Center has been dedicated to providing a variety of valuable services to the City of Clemson and surrounding areas. The center was a collaboration between the City, Abel Baptist Church and the Littlejohn Family. Abel Baptist Church ran an after-school program at the time and the church was at capacity in terms of space and sustainability for the after-school program. The City of Clemson received CDBG funds to build the original facility that was operated by a non-profit, formed and named after the Littlejohn family, who initially donated the land.



Initially the center housed a Head Start Program, offered GED classes and an after-school program. As time passed the number of program participants increased and programs expanded until the building was at capacity. The City also recognized the challenges residents faced had changed. To address these challenges, ACOG assisted the city with securing CDBG funds to renovate and expand the building an additional 5,000 square feet with a total project cost of approximately \$2.2 million. The expansion accommodates new office space, classrooms, computer labs, multipurpose room, community room and storage space.

Expansion has allowed the center to continue their initial Head Start, GED, and after-school programs as well as establish new programs such as an Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), which provides counseling and information on college admissions to qualified

adults seeking a post-secondary education. The center also added events throughout the year such as JuneTeenth Celebration, Health Fairs, and Family Fun Festivals. Additionally, the center is home to a Police Sub-station.



Countless individuals and families, especially those in the low to moderate income households, have benefited from the programs offered at the center. Since the center's re-opening in August of 2021 an additional 709 persons have benefited from their services. The City of Clemson's long-standing commitment to provide quality accessible facilities and services provides for community needs, enhances residents' quality of life, and builds a sense of community. This is a great example of a city supporting their residents with the help of community groups and other agencies to establish sustainable programs that can span generations. The expansion and continued support of the Littlejohn Community Center is certainly an achievement worth celebrating.



# WORKLINK

WorkLink develops the link between employers and employees in Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens Counties through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Act is designed to help job seekers access education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market.

WorkLink, partners with local service providers to administer programs for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. These services increase the quality and accessibility of programs provided to job seekers and employers. WorkLink's goal is to ensure the local workforce development system is market-driven and meets the employment and training needs of employers and job seekers.

**10,957**

Customer visits to SC Works Centers

**400**

Soft skills workshops and activities

**200**

Occupational trainees

**\$333,054**

WIOA scholarships

**\$375,000**

In grant funding to local employers for Incumbent Worker Training

## HELP DURING COVID

At the start of 2020, Debbie was working for a school district in Anderson County. Unfortunately, she was laid off due to funding restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Debbie was left financially burdened and worried she would have to claim unemployment when a friend reached out to her about the WIOA Program at SC Works.


Debbie reached out to SC Works and was assigned a career coach, Billy Hunter. Billy developed an Individual Employment Plan and assisted her in maneuvering the journey through the WIOA Program.

Debbie enrolled in the resume writing workshop and the interviewing workshop to build her soft skills. She then applied for the WIOA Scholarship and enrolled in Tri-County Technical School to take CDL classes.

While dealing with personal struggles, Billy helped Debbie stay on track and motivated towards her goals. Her hard work paid off and she recently received her CDL truck driver's license. Debbie says, "I'm 56, and my success in the program lets you know that it doesn't matter how old you are, you can do anything you want to do."

"SC Works is why I am where I am now and I had a great success coach. Thank you, Billy, and thank you, SC Works!"

— Debbie W.

A portrait of Lori Morales Rojas, a young woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a patterned top. In the background, there is a wooden door and a green plant.

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## LORI MORALES ROJAS

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Palmetto Youth Connections Participant

Palmetto Youth Connections is a community partnership administered by Eckerd Workforce Development Services. PYC offers supportive services to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth participants in the form of course/training costs, transportation assistance, childcare, tools, uniforms, books and monetary incentives for goal completion.

# APPALACHIAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Appalachian Development Corporation (ADC) is a nonprofit economic development lender established to support economic development in the Appalachian Region. Business lending programs include multiple financing options. The goal of ADC is to work in conjunction with local lending institutions to structure "gap-financing" loans that improves the applicant's overall debt service requirements. The funding comes primarily from public dollars and the primary purpose is to leverage local investments to maximize the applicant's resources to create jobs for our area.

The ADC manages the Appalachian Loan Fund (ALF) on behalf of the ACOG. The ALF loan pool is capitalized by grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the State of South Carolina. The ALF is a source of low-cost, long-term, fixed-rate financing for businesses whose projects will result in the creation of permanent full-time jobs and leverage private sector investment.

**10**  
Loans Closed

**\$2.3**  
Loaned

**\$5.2**  
Private Capital Leveraged

**142**  
Jobs Created or Retained

The Spice & Tea Exchange



The Spice & Tea Exchange



Now Serving  
Hot & Cold Tea

Come In and  
Smell the Spices!

Hand-Mixed Spice Blends  
Gourmet Sea Salts  
Historically-Flavored Sugars  
Exotic Teas  
Gifts & Accessories