

## 2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Challenge Project Descriptions

<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Bristol Bay Native Association, Inc.
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$405,023
<b>Project Name:</b>	Bristol Bay Jobs Accelerator Project
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Bristol Bay Borough, Alaska
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Fisheries, Seafood Processing
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	<p>The Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA) will provide technical assistance to the Southwest Alaska Vocational and Education Center (SAVEC) to build training capacity in the Bristol Bay fisheries and seafood processing industry cluster. The project will accelerate job creation in the fisheries and seafood industry through boosting workforce skills, growing seafood manufacturing, and developing effective marketing linkages. The project will assist distressed rural communities in the region by leveraging local assets, building stronger economies and creating regional linkages.</p>
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to increase the capacity of the commercial fishing and seafood processor industry cluster within the region. Activities will include the delivery of technical assistance services, the organization and management of an industry focused conference event, and development of a regional fisheries business cooperative.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to accelerate job creation in the commercial fishing industry through regional collaborations to provide technical assistance to SAVEC who will provide industry training in the region. SAVEC will create linkages with regional entities, coordinate fishery and seafood processing industry cluster training programs, develop an effective outreach process, and match students to courses and businesses. A program will be developed that is responsive to the needs of processing business entrepreneurs, individuals who want to work in fisheries, and those who are already engaged but need upgraded training such as learning and complying with new regulations or safety practices. The project will use SAVEC and the University of Alaska's local Bristol Bay Campus (BBC) for the fishery and seafood processing industry cluster training.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Wholesome Wave Foundation Charitable Ventures, Inc.
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$568,150
<b>Project Name:</b>	New England Food Hub Cluster Initiative
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Low-income, rural tracts of MA, ME, NH, RI, CT, VT
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Food Hubs (aggregation and processing)
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	<p>The New England Food Hub Initiative will provide technical assistance and links to capital to support the development and growth of food producers, processors, storage, and transporters throughout New England. The project will grow the New England regional cluster/network of healthy food hubs through business development, regionally networking back office support and technology, best practices and convening, as well as, access to financing. It will also address the demand for locally produced foods and support the creation of new private sector jobs in food production, storage, processing, and transportation throughout the Northeast. In addition, rural farmers, fisherman and value-added processors will benefit from access to additional markets and revenue.</p>
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to: network food hubs into a supportive cluster; set up shared services; and perform a feasibility study of the potential for marketing Maine seafood through the regional food hub system; and connect food hubs with public and private investors.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Activities will include hands-on business strategy and technical assistance development for food hub management teams. The project will also convene the cluster and provide workshops and opportunities for peer learning and sharing of innovations and best practices. Wholesome Wave will help to broker relationships and contracts between the food hubs and institutional customers and provide technical assistance on regulatory challenges to the hubs and their suppliers.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Henry County Economic Development Partnership and Bi-State Regional Commission
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$193,500
<b>Project Name:</b>	Henry-Rural Rock Island-Mercer County Economic Development Consortium
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Henry and Mercer counties combined with the un-urbanized areas of Rock Island County.
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Agribusiness, Food Processing & Technology; Arts, Entertainment, Recreation & Visitor Industries (Rural Tourism); Manufacturing (Advanced/Specialty) ; and Transportation Logistics
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	This initiative will create a single, unifying rural economic development entity to serve a nearly three county area in western Illinois and will hire staff to work on issues of rural regional economic development. The project will provide planning and analysis that will grow the capacity of the region's rural economic development agencies to new levels, while building connections of the key clusters to local governments, economic development agencies and new markets.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be focused on planning and analysis to support the region. Activities will include developing a rural economic development plan and cluster analysis, conducting a business needs assessment, supporting engagement of entrepreneurs, and efforts to boost rural tourism in the region.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to build the capacity of the region's rural economic development agencies. Activities will include establishing and expanding the Henry-Rural Rock Island-Mercer County Economic Development Consortium (HRRM) local foods network, coordinating and increasing HRRM rural entrepreneur engagement, and conducting HRRM rural tourism community assessments.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Kansas State University
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$715,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	Project 17: Together We Succeed
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Project will serve 17 counties in Southeast Kansas
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Advanced Manufacturing
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The goal of “Project 17” is to create and sustain well-paying jobs in the Southeast Kansas region. To do this, the project seeks to improve the competitiveness of advanced manufacturing businesses by accelerating innovation that will drive business growth and development. Activities will include the creation of a shared regional vision and an asset-based development plan to spur job and wealth creation.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to create an opportunity innovation network which will accelerate innovation and improve business competitiveness. The opportunity innovation network will provide the advantages of urban clusters (opportunity volume, resource density, diversity of interactions, and proximity to markets) to rural and distressed areas in Southeast Kansas where dense clusters do not exist. Activities will include: (1) profiling the innovation-based assets competencies, capabilities, and needs of the region, communities, and their local companies; (2) developing the ability to scout out new business opportunities outside existing markets (including global opportunities) where individuals, businesses, and communities may have little to no connection access and connect businesses with innovation resources; (3) facilitating the ability to readily connect and combine opportunities, individuals, companies, and communities, throughout the region in innovative ways so that the response is greater than the sum of its respective parts.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be invested in building the capacity within this region to support the opportunity innovation network. Activities will include: 1) creating a shared regional vision and an asset-based development plan to spur job creation; 2) empowering project recipients to work together to enhance the competitiveness of goods producing entrepreneurs and existing businesses in the region; 3) creating an active network of connectors, technology providers, expertise, capital, and potential business partners who can enable regional businesses to respond in a competitive manner; and 4) creating and executing a sustainability plan that ensures this effort continues in the future. All of the above will be provided through technical assistance in the form of workshops, conferences, civic engagements, marketing material, data collection, and economic databases.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Louisiana Tech University and Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$964,134
<b>Project Name:</b>	I-20 Corridor Regional Accelerator
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Bienville, Morehouse, Union, Richland and Webster Parishes and other areas within the I-20 corridor
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Information, Energy, Green Technology, Biosciences
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The I-20 Corridor Regional Accelerator will integrate the community capacity building of Winrock's Capacity Assistance for the Regional Economy (CARE) program with business and economic development led by Louisiana Tech University. The project will leverage the ability of both organizations to bring key players to the table to engage small towns and rural communities to stimulate new economic activity and quality job growth in key regional economic clusters through the provision of services, local award packages and/or locally-funded business investment strategies,
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to support Louisiana Tech's I-20 Corridor Regional Accelerator and its efforts to leverage regional resources to provide technical assistance, individualized business support, and professional networking services for local businesses. Networking opportunities for participating businesses, entrepreneurs, and industry cluster leaders will be a key component of the Accelerator. The Accelerator will also leverage Louisiana Economic Development's new Economic Gardening Initiative which connects growing businesses with peer mentoring.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will assist the Capacity Assistance for the Regional Economy (CARE) program in providing capacity building assistance to community leaders in six northern Louisiana communities. Each CARE community will receive group trainings, one-on-one technical assistance and access to mentor communities. In addition, each CARE community will assess local entrepreneurs in their communities for participation in the I-20 Corridor Regional Business Accelerator.</p> <p><b>DRA:</b> Funds will support efforts by Winrock to facilitate private sector mentorship to the companies admitted to the Accelerator and by providing personalized strategic assistance in the areas of market analysis, business and financial modeling and management team development. Key to this support will be the linking of Accelerator clients with mentor entrepreneurs with experience in business expansion and startup development.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Mississippi State University (MSU)
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$1,065,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	Accelerating Jobs and Innovation through Community and Economic Development in Rural Mississippi
<b>Identified Region:</b>	61 rural Mississippi counties
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Automotive, Furniture and Agribusiness (derived from Mississippi's rural Appalachian and Delta regions).
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The project will link the region's small existing businesses and entrepreneurs into the region's strategic clusters through networking oriented conferences at each of the sub-regional hubs. It will focus on connecting minority and underrepresented groups into the economic vitality of the clusters and identifying strong growth prospects from the region's existing industry through ongoing existing business assessments. In addition, the project will work with the region's community leaders to develop action programs that provide detailed analysis of key clusters (i.e. automotive, furniture, and agribusiness) so that specific growth opportunities emerge, and leaders are able to take part in new opportunities.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to support business oriented action programs that will focus on working directly with prospective entrepreneurs through techniques made available from the Kauffman Foundation to accelerate the formation of new and innovative businesses. Linkages will be developed among the region's small existing businesses and entrepreneurs and the region's strategic clusters. Strong growth prospects from the region's existing industry will be identified. This will result in a series of "technology transfer" projects and "best practices" workshops to be made available to these existing businesses; thus, enabling these existing businesses to accelerate into these growth opportunities.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will support the community development oriented aspects of the project, which will include extensive work with the region's community leaders to develop "Action Programs." These programs will include detailed analysis of key clusters (i.e., automotive, furniture, and agribusiness) so that specific growth opportunities emerge, developing community leaders to assist in taking advantage of these opportunities through the USDA "<i>Stronger Economies Together</i>" program, and increasing entrepreneurial opportunity, enabled by access to broadband (e.g., marketing, on-line catalogues, and developing new software applications). These Action Programs will target greater levels of inclusion among all constituencies, including minority and under-represented entrepreneurs.</p> <p><b>ARC:</b> Funds will support activities of the MSU project team who will work closely with potential and existing entrepreneurs and small businesses by linking potential mentors from anchor companies and retired entrepreneurs in the ARC region. Additionally, these clients will be given access to training programs which will accelerate their business development and growth to help insure entrepreneurial success, and help</p>

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	<p>job creation for the region. The MSU team will link interested clients to funding resources to further develop their business. Companies ready to expand will be linked to the MSU links and contacts in the venture capital funding area. The project team will provide technical assistance to new and existing businesses in the areas of lean manufacturing, deliver technical education workshops in area of engineering financial analysis and professional development, and work one-on-one with companies needing specific technical assistance.</p> <p><b>DRA:</b> Funds will support activities of the MSU project team to link other resources and networks to businesses, managers, entrepreneurs, and communities which will provide education, training, access to financial capital, and sources for technical assistance. The project team will work closely with potential and existing entrepreneurs and small businesses by linking potential mentors from anchor companies and retired entrepreneurs in the DRA region. In addition, the project team will provide technical assistance to new and existing businesses in the areas of lean manufacturing, deliver technical education workshops in area of engineering financial analysis and professional development, and work one-on-one with companies who need specific technical assistance.</p>
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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Western North Carolina Regional Economic Development Non-Profit Corporation (AdvantageWest) and Land-of-Sky Regional Council
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$815,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	WNC AgriVentures -- Cultivating Jobs and Innovation Project
<b>Identified Region:</b>	The 23 western-most counties of North Carolina, known as the AdvantageWest Region including: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The project seeks to address critical economic development concerns in rural regions including: quality job creation, creating strong linkages between regional industries and rural communities, filling supply-chain gaps in growing rural sustainable industries, engaging youth in rural entrepreneurship, supporting private sector innovation and business creation, retaining wealth in rural communities, and creating a replicable model for regional sustainable economic development in rural Appalachia and America. The project will assist the sustainable agriculture and natural resources clusters by developing planning, feasibility studies and small pilot programs to identify and promote investment in major supply chain opportunities and provide Western North Carolina businesses with access to new technology from regional universities and other research and development centers.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be focused on: (1) linking rural WNC with emerging economic development opportunities within the targeted sustainable agriculture/natural resources cluster; (2) establishing an integrated regional approach to growing this cluster; (3) identifying and filling supply chain gaps; (4) greatly improving rural WNC's access to technology; and (5) networking businesses and resources within the cluster. Specific activities will include leadership development; infrastructure planning, feasibility studies and small pilot programs to facilitate investment in major supply-chain opportunities; establishing an interface between the regions' sustainable businesses and the R&amp;D capabilities of regional universities, assisting with commercialization and access to capital; and connecting businesses, entrepreneurs and investors within the cluster.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to provide critical entrepreneurship training to service providers throughout rural Western North Carolina. These "train-the-trainer" courses will build long-term community economic development capacity in the region that will better assist entrepreneurs and industry. Funds will also be used for a Farmers-to-Farmland Pilot program that will help new farmers get access to their most important resource. The program will link farmland owners who want to lease or sell their land with new or existing farmers in the market for new farmland.</p>



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	<p><b>ARC:</b> Funds will be used to accelerate a minimum of 10 high-impact entrepreneurial sustainable ventures per year with strategic mentors, focused regional resources, and peer-to-peer learning.</p>
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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. and North Carolina State University
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$715,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	North Carolina Eastern Region Aerospace and Automotive Cluster Project
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Lenoir, Greene, Wayne, Wilson, Edgecombe, and Pitt Counties
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Aerospace; Automotive
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The project will deliver a targeted program of comprehensive economic development services to significantly advance job and business growth in the aerospace and automotive manufacturing cluster in eastern North Carolina. Strategies will include developing advanced manufacturing practices, deepening regional supply chain connections, building capacity of regional workforce and entrepreneur support systems to better access the cluster and supply chain, and financing strong projects that advance cluster and regional economic outcomes.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to: (1) Provide targeted business development services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the sector, including market and organizational assessments, business plan refinements, access to capital, and comprehensive business counseling; (2) Systematically evaluate up to 20 firms in the targeted area to identify a sub-set of firms with high-growth capacity. Provide in-depth assistance in process analysis and improvement, critical supplier development, and training to meet rigorous industry quality standards to select firms; and (3) Analyze and map the clusters and convene the Cluster Advisory Group, identifying supplier and contractor opportunities for SMEs and entrepreneurs, workforce development needs, and opportunities for connecting to other firms and services in this manufacturing cluster that are located outside of the region.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Through the Rural Center’s highly successful workforce development and entrepreneurship programs, four diverse recipients serving five eligible counties in the region will receive technical and capacity building assistance. Capacity building will focus on expanding the ability of these recipient organizations to train local workforce beneficiaries on how to access cluster related employment. In addition, the Rural Center will provide workforce development training and industry analysis to recipients equipping them to better identify opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs to link to the cluster’s regional supply chain.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Northern Community Investment Corporation
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$708,750
<b>Project Name:</b>	Northern Tier Farm and Forest Jobs Accelerator
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties in Vermont; Coos, Grafton and Carroll counties in New Hampshire; and Oxford and Franklin counties in Maine
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Wood Products; Agricultural
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The project will implement a broad strategy across both food and wood fiber clusters to create jobs, lower energy costs, increase value-added processing and marketing, retain local wealth, and enhance local transportation, telecommunications infrastructure and the entrepreneurial environment in eight rural, economically distressed counties in northern New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Activities include: (1) increasing the installation of high-efficiency wood pellet boilers by working with installers and businesses and providing training for energy-efficient contractors and wood pellet system installers and reducing energy costs for businesses in the region based on the availability of the natural gas pipeline traversing the region; (2) developing a business plan for the operation of a regional processing facility based on the availability and marketability of food products and developing operational models for the distribution and warehousing of the value-added products; (3) developing a business model for the most feasible alternative for the delivery of low-cost energy – bulk delivery of wood pellets and of compressed natural gas; and (4) fostering the basic skills of wood products workers, advancing lean manufacturing and mass customization for wood products and providing entrepreneurial training.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Activities include: (1) inventorying primary agricultural producers and assessing market demand for their products; (2) developing and implementing a regional promotional campaign for value-added wood and food products in order to expand to more urban markets; (3) expanding affordable high speed internet access in the region by developing solutions for un-served areas and assisting businesses with training for the development of internet-based sales and marketing to expand market opportunities; and (4) providing matching technical assistance grants to businesses in order for them to build their capacity with assistance from professionals, including but not limited to, engineering and website design.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	SouthernCarolina Regional Development Alliance
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$650,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	SouthernCarolina Alliance Rural Jobs & Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, and Hampton Counties in South Carolina
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Nuclear; Metal Fabrication; Aeronautic; Automotive
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	This project will build the capacity of the region’s public and private sectors to successfully fill existing and future highly skilled craft jobs (nuclear welding and metal fabrication), develop strategies to capitalize on aeronautics and automotive clusters, and engage employers, public and non-profit boards in leadership development that results in stronger education-industry programs to connect the region’s under and unemployed and youth to existing and future jobs.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to: (1) Establish and grow the Nuclear and Advanced Manufacturing Skills Academy (NAMSA) in Allendale, SC and provide a minimum of two advanced welding certificate programs that meet the needs of the sectors; and (2) Perform in-depth analysis of the market, map the assets and define a strategy for marketing to the Automotive and Aeronautic clusters.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Project activities include: (1) Establishing a Nuclear Advanced Metalworking Academy program to train at least 100 highly skilled welders annually for current and projected job openings; (2) Completing target market and asset mapping studies for two potential clusters that will identify actions and opportunities for local industries and workers in these sectors; and (3) Engaging public and non-profit groups in leadership training, particularly to increase the capacity and depth of services to low and moderate income populations, emphasizing business-education partnerships and school to work transitions.</p>

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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Network
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$815,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	Appalachian Spring – Using Asset-Based and Creative Economy Methods to Catalyze Rural Job Acceleration
<b>Identified Region:</b>	19 counties designated as Southwest Virginia: Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, Wythe and Franklin
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Music; Craft; Outdoor Recreation/Natural Heritage; Local Food; Broadband
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	The project will focus on integrating downtown revitalization plans with cultural and natural assets of the region to foster resources for asset growth and job creation. It will promote sustainable economic development of the region's communities by assisting local artisans with marketing, educational and entrepreneurial opportunities. Further, the project will assist in the expansion of cultural heritage ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises, including the Southwest Virginia Artisan Center, the Crooked Road, Round the Mountain, and related cultural heritage organizations and venues that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds for Appalachian Spring will be used to support asset-based regional networking reflecting Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) from all participating Economic Development Districts/Planning District Commissions and providing essential connections of asset-based clusters to markets to expand job creation opportunities for all project stakeholders. This process includes creation of a regional asset-based strategic plan (including SWOT analysis) in concert with counties, towns, and cities. The group will identify and solidify logical regional clusters based on existing and immediately planned assets. Particular emphasis will be paid to coordination and mobilization of broadband coverage for entire region including downtowns—prime location for entrepreneurial ecosystem development.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to hire four key personnel who will become employees of the Friends of Southwest Virginia. These positions include one Outreach Coordinator who will have direct interaction and technical assistance with crafts and local foods business owners; one Community Development Finance Specialist who will identify and connect potential funding sources for artisans, agri-artisans, farmers, and other beneficiaries; one Data Specialist who will analyze marketing and branding efforts across the region, provide data for marketing and capital strategy development; and one Nonprofit Funding Specialist who will research and pursue funding assistance and develop organizational assistance with potential revenue plans.</p> <p><b>ARC:</b> Funds will be used to develop a marketing and rebranding campaign to catalyze visitation to and investment in assets for all</p>

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	<p>clusters. In addition, ARC funds will build the music cluster based on downtown historic theaters. Support will include business plan development, booking support, and promotional aggregation.</p>
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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Marshall University Research Corporation
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$717,985
<b>Project Name:</b>	Southern West Virginia Rural Jobs Accelerator Partnership
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Raleigh, Fayette, Wyoming, McDowell, Mercer, Summers, Mingo, Logan, and Monroe Counties in West Virginia
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Tourism; Advanced Manufacturing
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	<p>This partnership will assist counties in southern West Virginia by providing technical assistance, workforce development, entrepreneurial support and a wealth of collaborated resources to rejuvenate existing regional assets, build stronger economies, and create regional linkages to foster economic growth in tourism and advanced manufacturing. Activities will include but are not limited to: (1) outreach efforts that concentrate on training a quality workforce with high-end skill sets; (2) fast-tracking certification and degree programs offered to bolster the qualifications of individuals and companies needed for advanced manufacturing; (3) training, technical assistance, financial assistance, and the sharing of knowledge and resources to empower small-to-medium sized businesses and budding entrepreneurs in advanced manufacturing and tourism; (4) grantsmanship assistance to community governments and organizations; (5) mobile app development and e-business marketing assistance; (6) expansion of a closely linked resource network of businesses, vendors, community and government agencies, financial resources, and academia; and (7) educational and training programs that specifically support the identified clusters.</p>
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to enhance the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing's (RCBI's) 21st Century Manufacturing Network – an electronic online clearinghouse for the collection, classification, and distribution of information related to businesses, manufacturers, vendors, suppliers, new product development, market information, educational opportunities, and business partnerships. This valuable resource is the link to connecting agencies and businesses with a supply chain, product designers with manufacturers, students with jobs and mentors, suppliers with buyers, and individuals/companies with educational and training opportunities. A key component of this work is to support and stimulate entrepreneurial activity in the region. Expanding on the already successful efforts of Innovate WV – an existing EDA grant and technical assistance program for engineering design and prototyping – RCBI and its partners will plan a series of outreach entrepreneur demonstration workshops and informational sessions involving a collaboration of regional, state and academic resources in each of the nine counties. Other activities in the three-year program will include the collaborative development of workshops, seminars, and webinars on: (1) grantsmanship, (2) facilitating SBIR/STTR grant proposal development for research and development projects, (3) utilizing 3D printing technology to develop models for marketing, (4) building collaborations and partnerships, and (5) finding financial support for new businesses.</p>

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	<p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to: (1) develop and facilitate educational workshops and webinars in the region on the principles and advantages of e-business, (2) provide e-business and social media technical assistance, and (3) assist local businesses in website development and assistance.</p> <p><b>ARC:</b> Funds will be used to stimulate job creation, entrepreneurial efforts and technical training and assistance in Wyoming, McDowell, Summers, and Monroe counties, which are among the most rural and poorest counties in West Virginia. ARC funded activities will support the USDA and EDA activities through a deepened integration of technical assistance, including grantsmanship and distance learning technology, into the most remote and compromised counties in the target area. These activities will be strengthened by using common partners and common resources to synchronize related programs across all scopes of work.</p>
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<b>Grant Program:</b>	2012 Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	Natural Capital Investment Fund, Inc.
<b>Total Funding:</b>	\$815,000
<b>Project Name:</b>	WV Value Chain Cluster Initiative
<b>Identified Region:</b>	Doddridge, Tyler, Ritchie, Gilmer, Fayette, Greenbrier, Monroe, Pocahontas, Calhoun, Clay, Roane, Wirt, Barbour, Preston, Randolph, Tucker, and Upshur Counties in West Virginia
<b>Identified Cluster:</b>	Food-related Value Chain
<b>Project Description and Objectives:</b>	<p>The West Virginia Value Chain Cluster Initiative is a pioneering, statewide project that will expand the business and financial capacity of four regional food-related “value chain clusters.” It will deliver a comprehensive and integrated set of hands-on technical assistance and coaching services that will further strengthen management, operational and financial expertise of the clusters. These activities will be customized to each cluster’s needs and stage of organizational growth, as well as the end recipients’ individual needs. The primary objective of the Initiative is to support the clusters’ ability to increase capacity and extend their impact and the long-term sustainability of their value chains. Related objectives include: (1) helping cluster participants to grow their output and increase revenue, and (2) creating quality jobs as a result of increased business productivity and growth.</p>
<b>Brief Description of Activities to be Funded by Each Agency:</b>	<p><b>EDA:</b> Funds will be used to provide technical assistance to food businesses in expanding their access to new markets and buyers, and to build a stronger network that promotes new regional business linkages. The project will identify new businesses in food-related clusters, provide technical assistance and coaching services to strengthen management, operations and financial expertise, offer access to capital, provide advice on technological improvements, assist in new business development, and share best practices among cluster members, to raise income levels and create new job opportunities.</p> <p><b>USDA:</b> Funds will be used to provide two Regional Coordinators to directly work with the four Local Lead Organizations and the community-based partners within their clusters, such as producer co-operatives or farmers markets. The Regional Coordinators, together with the Local Lead Organizations, will assess the needs of each cluster, identify appropriate technical assistance for the cluster, and create a plan for accessing technical assistance.</p> <p><b>ARC:</b> Funds will be used to provide intensive technical assistance to ensure that the businesses’ critical non-financial needs are addressed, thus enabling them to perform more efficiently and profitably, and also to position them to apply for funding from the Natural Capital Investment Fund or another lender. The targeted technical assistance will be used to strengthen the end-recipients’ business practices, helping to remove hurdles to growth by cluster participants in the Initiative’s service area, the majority of which are situated in ARC at-risk and distressed counties.</p>