

# BUILD YOUR PLAN

## About the Just Transition Fund's Blueprint for Just Transition

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A national energy transition is sweeping the country—and many communities are feeling the impact as coal mines close and coal-fired power plants are replaced by natural gas and renewable energy sources. In many of these communities, coal-fired plants or mines are the primary drivers of the local economy. Plant and mine closures cause significant economic distress to the surrounding community, including job loss and erosion of the local tax base as tax revenues decline and communities are forced to cut school budgets, health care benefits, and other public sector services.

For local leaders working to identify a path forward, knowing where to start can be paralyzing. But, once they begin charting a plan, they find that while transitioning their community away from coal is challenging, it is far from impossible.

The Just Transition Fund (JTF) has provided direct technical assistance to help communities impacted by the energy transition create plans to guide their transition away from coal while maintaining a robust economy. Through that work, we've gathered a wealth of experience, guidance, suggestions, and ideas for how to get started. We know from first-hand experience that early planning is critical for sustainable and meaningful community transition—and we've created this resource to help local leaders do just that.

Our Blueprint for Just Transition is a comprehensive resource to help coal communities and local leaders create an equitable, sustainable, and inclusive future. It features tips and information for community-based nonprofits and municipal leaders in places where coal plants and mines are scheduled to close—or have already shuttered.

# Why You Should Plan

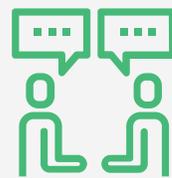
The sooner you engage in the work of community transition, the better off your community will be. Some of the most successful transitions have happened in communities that started openly discussing, planning for, and funding their transition work as soon as the plant or mine closure was announced—even if the closure was years away.

**This document outlines four steps to Build Your Plan.** Each step builds on the one before. As you move through the steps, remember that planning is an iterative process. You will likely need to make adjustments as you go to best meet the needs and opportunities of your communities.



## Take Stock >

Start by taking stock of your community's capacity for transition planning, the impacts of the closure and challenges that exist, and the assets and opportunities you can build upon as you plan for your community's future.



## Engage >

When starting the coal transition planning process, it is important to have all partners and community stakeholders at the table to help outline your goals. An agreement on clear, measurable goals will ensure all players have buy-in and are united as you move forward.



## Build the Framework for Action >

Determine how your community will measure progress toward your shared goals and generate ideas for getting to your agreed upon vision for the future.



## Take Action >

The Just Transition Fund is committed to supporting communities as they take concrete action to strengthen and diversify local economies.



# Take Stock

## Identify Your Leadership Team

The key to building a successful plan is leadership. Leadership comes in all forms and should include representation from every part of the community, especially communities with low income and communities of color that have been left behind.

From resources, to connections, to information, these leaders will bring different assets to help guide each step of the transition from taking stock and gathering facts, engaging the community, building your community goals, and taking action.

Transition is a complex process. As the plan comes together, everyone will have their own interests, priorities, and values. Look for transition team leaders who are knowledgeable about the economy of the community and region, have knowledge of the impacts of the closure, are trusted by the community, and have influence with others who might provide resources to support your effort. Those whose lives are impacted the most or who have been sidelined or overlooked in the past should be at the center of the decision-making process. And remember—the most effective leaders for transition may not be the “usual suspects.”

While it may be challenging to find the right person, it is important to engage the plant or mine owners in the conversation and potentially invite them to join your transition team. They can provide essential information about the decommissioning and closure as well as possibilities for reuse or redevelopment of the site.

Some members of your leadership team may be involved during the entire process. Others might best contribute during certain phases. Throughout the process, leaders must create a safe space for engagement that allows all impacted stakeholders to feel comfortable participating. This is necessary to ensure that the community visioning process is authentic and meaningful.

### YOUR TRANSITION TEAM MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Individuals from **federal, state, regional, and local government** bring knowledge of municipal processes, including land use and zoning requirements, options for legislative actions, and environmental policies and processes for remediation.
- **Labor representatives** bring knowledge of worker needs and skill sets that can be beneficial when planning for retraining and workforce development programs.
- **Community members**, including residents and business owners, bring knowledge of community assets, needs, and skill sets.
- **Environmental and economic justice organizations** bring knowledge of legacy environmental impacts and expertise organizing with those most impacted by the closure.
- **Non-profit or faith-based organizations** may help foster trust and bring volunteers and other resources.
- People from **academia** bring research resources and potentially knowledge from other cases of economic transition.
- **Tribal communities** bring knowledge of community needs and assets.
- **Philanthropic groups** bring resources to nascent efforts and can help get transition planning processes off the ground.
- **Issue experts**, including school finance practitioners, local taxation and finance managers, realtors, community planners, union leaders, and economic development professionals, can contribute valuable information to help move the process forward. Each of these groups works within a framework that is essential to understand and will influence your success.
- **Representatives of the utility and owners of the site** have decision-making power and bring knowledge of site infrastructure and plans for the future.

# Build Your Community Profile

**Transitions that succeed are the ones that are rooted in facts—not assumptions or rumors.** When you know the facts, you can plan for the future with more certainty.

Take time to understand how local government, taxes, and the community function. The more you understand the interconnected workings of your community, the more you can understand which details may be affected by the closure, and where ripple effects will occur. Be honest about what you still need to know and don't hesitate to ask leaders in your community, in the state, or at federal agencies how you might obtain the information or connect to expert resources.

## KEY QUESTIONS

As you begin to shape your plan for transition, information gathering should be ongoing. Depending on how your community goals develop, you'll likely need to learn more detail about taxation, public finance, workforce retraining, or other issues identified during the process. **The following questions are designed to help you think through the potential impacts of a plant or mine closure in your community.**

### **Where do tax dollars originate currently and how are they spent?**

What percentage of your community's tax revenue comes from the plant or mine? Some tax revenue serves as leverage or as a match for other sources not dependent on the tax base, such as health department funds for vaccines, emergency services, or fees for regional waste authorities.

### **If your community can no longer provide its share, will it put state or federal matching funds at risk?**

Are state sources available to supplement needed matches or fees to other agencies when an economic shift in a community occurs? Know the timing of revenue sharing, tax collections, and fiscal years. Learn how funding calendars can be synchronized or staggered to the best effect.

### **What's the value of the nonfinancial support the community gets from the utility or mine in question?**

Learn how much it would cost in user fees, for example, to field sports teams the company sponsors, to provide employees with temporary housing, or to underwrite arts or special events. These are all important, even if they sit at the lower end of the impact continuum.

### **How might the social and cultural fabric of the community change?**

When people relocate, they take their talents and passions with them. That can change how a community functions from a social or cultural standpoint. In smaller communities, such impacts can be more apparent than in larger communities. You may not be able to quantify these kinds of changes until later in the process, but it is important to identify community aspects that have thrived because of the talent and organizations that support them.

### **What are the properties and structures the mine or utility will leave behind after closure?**

How much land does the company own and/or control? Think about the future value of this land and how it can be used in the best interest of the community after the closure. How might the community influence future development of this land? Are there legacy environmental issues to consider in redevelopment?

### **What will a closure do to your community's infrastructure?**

Think about the function of roads, ports, rail lines, rail spurs, sewer lines, water lines, well heads, drainage, transmission lines, landfills, emergency services, and other pieces of infrastructure that are connected to a plant or mine that will be closed. Are there service agreements between the host community or other municipalities that will be affected? Map and quantify what these relationships are and what the likely financial and service impacts will be.

# A Note About Funding

Throughout the transition process, access to funds will be important and ongoing. Knowing what funding resources are available to your community early in the planning process can help.

A wide range of federal funding is available to assist communities with transition planning and implementation. The Just Transition Fund has a long track record of helping communities to access these funds. Below are some of the most common federal programs that support various aspects of transition.

## Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

- Partnership for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER)

## Small Business Administration

- Business Loan Program
- Entrepreneurial Development Programs

## U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

- Intermediary Relending Program
- Rural Energy for America Program (Grants and Loans)
- Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program

## U.S. Department of Labor

- Black Lung Disability Trust Fund
- Re-Employment, Support, and Training for the Opioid-Related (RESTORE)
- Workforce Opportunity for Rural Community (WORC)

## U.S. Economic Development Administration

- Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance
- Build to Scale

## U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

- Brownfields Grant Funding
- Recreation Economy for Rural Communities

A comprehensive list of federal programs that provide grants, loans, and technical assistance for community-based economic development projects may be found in our resource [Federal Programs for Communities in Economic Transition](#).

In addition, the [Initial Report to the President on Empowering Workers Through Revitalizing Energy Communities](#) also lists existing sources of federal funding available to Energy Communities.

JTF has assisted many communities in drafting federal grant proposals to apply for EDA grants, POWER grants, and Administration for Native Americans (ANA) grants. If you'd like more information about finding federal, state, or private funding opportunities for your transition efforts, we can help. Contact Emily Rhodes at [erhodes@justtransitionfund.org](mailto:erhodes@justtransitionfund.org).

## WHEN APPLYING FOR FUNDS:

- **Check to ensure your community's goals, vision, and geography align** with those of the funding source.
- For federal sources, **contact your state or regional program manager (see list on the left) to discuss your funding request or project idea.** Ask them to share examples of how to write a successful grant application.
- **Attend webinars or information sessions** that the funding source may provide.
- **Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity or Request for Proposals closely** to determine the funder's objectives and other grant application requirements, such as page length, letters of recommendation, budget information and format, and supplemental materials.
- **Reach out to strategic partners to discuss potential collaboration.** Strong partnerships can often lead to more dynamic proposals.



# Engage

## Build Partnerships

**Various groups in your community will feel the weight and possibilities of transition very differently.** Build partnerships across sectors by gathering, respecting, and examining all perspectives to ensure that you create a long-term transition plan that all community stakeholders can support. Equitable collaboration depends on diverse, inclusive, and active participation. Those who are most impacted by the transition away from coal must be at the forefront of planning for what comes next in your community.

Following are descriptions of 10 different groups and the concerns and ideas they may bring to the transition planning process. This list is by no means comprehensive. Every community and partnership is different. Use these ideas as a starting point, then add more partner segments that are relevant to your community.

### COMMON PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY TRANSITION

**Community Leaders:** Leaders of your community's nonprofit organizations, religious organizations, clubs, and even informal groups can deliver valuable grassroots insights on the concerns and hopes of residents.

**Community Members:** This group should include and prioritize local residents who have borne the environmental impacts of the plant or mine and/or those whose voices are often not heard in planning discussions but who bring deep knowledge of community assets and needs based on lived experience.

**Economic Development and Workforce Professionals:** Organizations and agencies working on economic and workforce development can support communities and regions throughout the transition process, from addressing the immediate economic shock of a closure, to diversifying their economies and supporting the workforce over the long-term.

**Environmental and Economic Justice Groups:** These organizations can provide input to help communities address legacy environmental issues around a closed coal plant or mine, organize those most impacted by the closure to participate in the planning process, and provide recommendations for how to best leverage sites to address the needs and concerns of historically marginalized groups.

**Labor and Trade Unions:** Workers who lose jobs as a result of the closure will be able to describe the immediate impacts and provide valuable information about what they would like to see next.

### BRING ALL STAKEHOLDERS TOGETHER

**Bringing the broader community together is the best way to create a response to an economic downturn.**

It is noted above but bears repeating: Those who are the most impacted or who have been sidelined from conversations in the past should be at the center of the decision-making process. When bringing the community together, ask people to share their solutions to the impacts they are experiencing.

**Municipal Leaders:** Elected officials and other government employees bring a deep knowledge of tax and public funding issues. They may feel the added pressure of sustaining public services in the face of diminishing revenue.

**Power Generation and Distribution Companies:** In some cases, a closure may create tension between these stakeholders and others. However, they can bring important resources to the conversation and a willingness to be productive contributors to the community.

**Public Agencies:** Depending on the agency, they have the ability to offer funding, technical assistance, and research. They also have the authority to pass transition legislation.

**Private Sector:** The private sector plays an important role in economic transitions and can provide the resources and expertise necessary to bring new economies to scale.

**Tribal Leaders:** Tribal communities face unique opportunities and challenges in the transition away from coal. Tribal leaders bring deep knowledge of the issues that impact their tribe the most.

## Identify Impacted Stakeholders

**What people and places will be most affected by a plant or mine closure, either directly or indirectly?** This list is probably longer than you think, and is driven by unanticipated ripples that occur over the months and years that follow a plant or mine closure. Ask your partners to help identify other impacted stakeholders. People feel those reverberations in the form of direct and indirect/secondary impacts. And those impacts may be anticipated, or take community members by surprise. To understand impacts in your community, ask people to share stories and express their experiences in their own words.

### **WHAT ARE DIRECT IMPACTS?** Direct impacts could include:

- loss of property and tax revenue;
- job loss at the plant and/or mines;
- change in infrastructure needs and use;
- legacy cleanup and remediation costs of coal-related operations; and/or
- worker loss of identity/sense of self.

### **WHAT ARE INDIRECT/SECONDARY IMPACTS?** These might include:

- gaps in the industrial and commercial supply chain of products and services;
- declining revenue for local businesses that provide essential goods or services;
- increased municipal insurance rates (these may rise as a local government's ability to provide services decreases).
- loss of housing value;
- reduced local government bond ratings (which makes it more difficult to fund capital improvements);
- higher residential and commercial vacancy rates;
- family instability due to loss of income and health insurance; and/or
- idle/oversized infrastructure;
- loss of population and personal resources of time or talent;

Direct and indirect impacts may affect specific portions of your community's population more than others. For example, workers who lose jobs as miners or plant operators may feel the brunt of the transition more acutely than area business owners, at least in the short run. Likewise, some areas of your community may also feel the effects of a plant or mine closure more acutely—such as neighborhoods with a high concentration of unemployed workers, or school districts that may suffer declining enrollment if families move away.

Not all impacts of a closure are negative. Consider the new opportunities a transition may create and who in your community can help identify what is possible. Looking at your list of existing assets can help identify new opportunities and can inform your plan for the long-term.

Make a list of all the groups and organizations within your community that will be affected—either directly or indirectly—by a mine or plant closure. Invite a representative from each of those groups and organizations to take part in your community's transition planning process.

In addition to those directly or indirectly affected, there will be others in your community who can add value to your transition planning. People with expert knowledge, connections, or even those known for visionary thinking or creativity can be key members of your planning team. Ask yourself:

- Who has influence in the community and how can this influence be used positively?
- What groups will lend a perspective that we might otherwise overlook (e.g., youth, labor unions, environmental groups)?
- Who can help the community find funding to support successful transition outcomes?

## Design an Inclusive Engagement Process

**Transition planning is messy work.** Members of your community may have widely different priorities. Here are six tips for keeping the engagement productive and moving the process forward.

### HERE ARE SIX GROUND RULES FOR KEEPING THE ENGAGEMENT PRODUCTIVE.

- 1. Honor the past.** Provide opportunities to acknowledge the generations of workers who have been employed by a plant or coal mine that is being closed and the importance that the plant has played in the community.
- 2. Use respected, neutral facilitators to create a safe space for discussions.** Find people and groups who can remain neutral and are respected in the community to help keep the conversations positive and forward-thinking. Identify the economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, and other organizations that are trusted proxies for economic development and social health and invite them into the conversation.
- 3. Make discussions accessible.** Hold facilitated discussions at various times of day to accommodate participants' schedules. Bring the listening process to locations people can easily reach. Some successful communities have created regular times and places for community members to simply gather informally over coffee to discuss what is on their minds.

**4. Acknowledge dissent, but avoid blame and denial.** Blame, denial, and lack of community cohesion regarding a positive way forward, cannot only bog down productive discussions, but also undermine your ability to secure funding or assistance at the regional or state level. Dissent is common, but a skilled facilitator or leader can manage it constructively to inform, rather than wreck, a productive conversation.

**5. Stick to the facts.** Community engagement is most effective when the discussion is grounded in fact. Present the facts and impacts as you know them, provide resources to address unanswered questions, and set the stage for constructive input from the community.

**6. Set clear goals.** Productive discussions have a clear purpose. Use the facts you have gathered and input from the various stakeholders to draft a set of goals for your transition process. Ensure that your community stakeholders can agree on those goals, or encourage them to draft goals together. This may take longer than you think, but consensus ultimately creates a much smoother process.

## Develop Your Community's Goals

### Why Start with the Goals?

Everyone needs a destination in mind before moving forward. It is vital to develop and *write down* your community's goals in achieving a just transition.

To some, this step may seem overly academic or even impossible. After all, how do you know what's possible before you start? And what about all the unexpected twists and turns you're bound to encounter along the way?

Coming to an early agreement on what your community wants to achieve is essential to a successful process. Remember, a goal doesn't tell you *how* you're going to get there. It just makes explicit how you will define success and how you will know you have achieved it. Doing this has several advantages that we will cover in this section.

Be warned: Setting meaningful goals is hard! It may be difficult to get the right level of focus from the various stakeholders. Some groups may be more adamant about certain facets of the problem than others. These challenges make it tempting to skip this step. It's easier to say things like:

- "Let's jump right in. We've lost enough time already."
- "Everyone already knows what we want to do."
- "We'll figure things out as we go along."
- "Things will change anyway, so why waste our time on this detail?"
- "This great opportunity (like a data center) has presented itself. We need to decide on it fast."

**So what happens if you skip this step and go right to discussing solutions?** It will be impossible to compare and assess competing ideas or determine which ones have the best shot at getting you to where you want to be. Developing the group's shared goals before you discuss possible solu-

tions will make everything easier. You can then refer back to your shared goals when evaluating alternatives and making decisions.

Setting goals up front will help you have more focused discussions and frame competing interests within the larger context. Shifting opinions won't derail the process. In other words, putting in the hard work to determine what your community wants to achieve in its transition efforts will pay off with a smoother, faster, and more efficient process that will ultimately lead to a higher likelihood of success. The effort spent in this phase of the process is time well spent.

## Where Do You Start?

To start, you need to understand what a goal is, and what it is not.

### A GOAL DESCRIBES YOUR IDEAL END STATE.

A goal describes where you want your community to be when your transition plan is fully implemented. It usually includes who is being supported, the geographic extent of your transition efforts, and the timeline of your expected outcomes.

### A GOAL DOES NOT INCLUDE A PREDETERMINED SOLUTION.

So you can say, "Our goal is to have a healthy local economy (reduce unemployment by 10 percent or reduce poverty by 10 percent) where community members are able to support their families with living-wage employment, start businesses in a business-friendly climate, and afford housing in the community." This describes the end state of your planning efforts. However, if you said, "Our goal is to bring a large employer to the area," that phrasing includes a solution. You will brainstorm and evaluate proposed solutions in a later stage of the process. Now is the time to create a shared vision by developing a goal (or set of goals) that everyone can agree on, not to start talking about possible solutions.

### A GOAL DOES NOT INCLUDE ACTION ITEMS OR TASKS.

Remember, you are not stating how you will proceed, but rather what you want your ideal end state to look like. Statements like, "We will conduct a gaps analysis to see what needs to be done" or "We will hire a consultant to create a jobs impact report" do not belong in your goal. Those statements are describing tasks that may (or may not) be helpful in achieving your goal, but they are not your goal.

## WHAT ARE SOME SAMPLE GOALS?

### So, what are examples of goals for a coal community in transition?

We recommend you develop goals that reflect the uniqueness of your community and the nuances of your situation. However, here are some examples to get you started:

**"To secure employment for all the coal workers laid off by the plant closure within the next two years."**

**"To replace the tax base loss caused by the closing mine so that schools and public services can continue operating as in pre-closure times."**

**"To maximize the economic benefit of county-owned real estate, including abandoned plant/mine lands."**

Make your goals as specific as possible, without crossing over into specific solutions. For example, "Rebuild our local economy" is likely too vague. However, "Bring a data center to the southeastern part of the county incentivized by tax credits" is not only too specific, but also includes a solution. A good middle ground would be, "Keep the county's employment rates at pre-plant closure levels, and limit cuts to public services to no more than 15 percent."

## **WHAT YOU DO NEXT WILL FLOW FROM YOUR GOALS.**

Many people think a “scope of work” is the right place to start any project. But a scope of work often describes what will be done and what steps will be taken. It belongs after goals have been defined and agreed upon by all stakeholders. If you have done a good job of defining your goals, you’ll find that the scope of work is fairly easy to write.

The process of defining your goal(s) may seem overly methodical, but the sequencing of these steps is important.

## **Who Should Be Involved?**

All of the stakeholders! There is a reason this step comes after you create your leadership team and community engagement process. It is essential to get input and consensus on the goal(s) from all stakeholder groups in your community. While the leadership team will take on some of the early tasks while taking stock (like identifying challenges and assets), developing shared goals involves your wider stakeholder group. It may feel like there are too many cooks in the kitchen, but it is vital that everyone’s voice is heard at this crucial step in the process.



# Build the Framework for Action

## Determine How to Measure

**It is time to figure out how you are going to evaluate the choices facing your community.**

Most people are familiar with the concept of metrics under a variety of names: indices of performance, evaluation criteria, measurement criteria, and OKRs. Whatever the name, the idea is the same: to establish an objective way of measuring a desired outcome. In this case, your desired outcome is achieving the goal you developed in the previous step. If your goal is to replace the jobs lost by a closing plant, your corresponding metric might be “number of laid-off plant workers who found another job in the area within one year.”

Note that a goal may have several metrics associated with it. For example, a goal of maintaining pre-closure public services could be measured by school enrollment numbers, budget levels, and population change.

A common mistake is starting with metrics rather than goals. Let’s look at an example from the financial services industry. If a bank decides to measure the success of its call center by looking at call hold times, it is optimizing towards the wrong goal (minimizing the customer’s hold time). The bank should prefer to have a satisfied customer (as measured by a post-call survey, or indirectly by customer retention rates) rather than assuming that short hold times will automatically lead to a happy customer. In other words, they should start with the desired outcome—to have a happy customer—rather than a preconceived notion of what metrics will matter.

A good metric should be **measurable, meaningful, and objective.**

- **Measurable:** This one is pretty self-explanatory. You want to be able to quantify (put a number to) the thing you’re capturing. If your goal is to have a healthy local economy, a bad metric that is not measurable would be, “high quality of life for all residents.” A better, measurable metric would be, “X percent of households are above the poverty line.”
- **Meaningful:** A metric should capture progress toward your goal, not just capture the amount of work or outreach you have done. This one is the hardest to implement in real life. If you are working on a policy action, for example, the temptation is strong to measure the number of legislators you have contacted, but this tells us little or nothing about progress made. A more meaningful metric would be the number of legislators who have become champions for your cause (e.g., co-sponsors of a bill, statements of support).
- **Objective:** An objective metric means that all observers come up with the same value when measuring. In other words, there is no subjective component to the evaluation of the metric. For example, counting the “number of high-wage jobs” may result in different numbers depending on different people’s definitions of what “high wage” means. An objective metric would be, “number of jobs that pay more than \$50k a year.”

## A Note About Iteration

When you get to this phase, you may realize there are metrics that are important to your community that do not seem to fit with any of your goals. This may be an indication that you are missing or misstated a goal. Remember: This process is iterative, and there is nothing wrong with going back to the goal development phase and making revisions. For example, you may realize that “number of jobs created” is likely a meaningful, important metric for your community’s transition, but doesn’t fit well with your stated goal. Could it be that you have left out of your goal statement a phrase about job creation or local economic growth? If this happens, the group should go back and revise the goal (and then update the metrics accordingly) until you have captured everything.

## A Word of Caution

While iteration is fine—even anticipated—at this stage, it should be strongly avoided beyond this phase. It is human nature to want to choose evaluation criteria after the fact to place a preferred solution in the best possible light. This can lead to a biased evaluation of alternatives. To avoid this, we suggest formalizing your goal and metrics in a shared document for reference, before moving forward.

## Generate Ideas

**Transition can be a time of great possibility.** In some cases, you have the opportunity to envision a new community and quality of life from the ground up. Think creatively about how to replace revenue and create a solid fiscal footing, good jobs, attractive spaces, a cohesive community, and a place where all generations will want to live for the long term.

It is also important to plan thoughtfully—not just for the coming months or years, but for decades. Long-term planning will help ensure that the vision and goals you collectively create accounts for the needs of all community members (and that everyone in your community understands the anticipated timeline).

Transition is never easy. Some of the toughest questions are also the most common when a mine or plant is closing. **Here are some tools for tackling four of the toughest questions.**

### WHAT ARE SOME SAMPLE METRICS?

Some example metrics that may help guide your community’s discussion are listed below. **Remember: Your metrics must be specific to your goals.** These are just to give you some ideas.

#### Tax Base

- Gain/loss by category: residential, commercial, industrial - lagging indicator
- By type of tax: sales, income, property, user fees, PILOTS, authorities, other

#### Population related

- Number of residents gained/lost by age
- Percent change in school enrollment levels

#### Employment related

- Number of jobs created
- Number of jobs retained
- Number of new businesses started

#### Land use related

- Percent change in industrial availability
- Percent change in commercial availability

#### Social fabric related

- Annual amount of charitable giving at the community level - leading indicator
- Number of volunteer driven organizations gained/lost - leading indicator

## How do we replace revenue?

Loss of revenue will likely be a considerable obstacle to achieving your community's shared goals for the future. In many cases, the community will need to adjust to a "new normal" in terms of how revenue is generated or what and how services are delivered—at least in the first few years. This will not be easy, but here are three approaches that can help.

- **Be clear and honest from the start.** Explain clearly that things will likely change while new sources of revenue come online. This could mean cuts to services, imposition of user fees for services, and consolidations to create economies of scale.
- **Consider using participatory budgeting to address budget shortfalls.** This process starts with quantifying the impacts of a closure so that a community can see clearly how the financial status of the community (and region) will change, how impacts on both contributors (taxpayers) and users (residents) of services will materialize, and how decisions to live within a new budget will be made.
- **Don't go it alone.** Seek financial help from the state or federal government and identify champions to help pursue such support. These discussions may spawn additional engagement or lobbying on the part of community members and may also help lawmakers embrace new priorities for government spending and for leveraging other available funds.

## How do we replace lost jobs?

Job loss is often the top-of-mind issue for communities in transition. While the search for suitable re-employment will likely be a struggle in the short term, there are many ways to ensure long-term success for transitioning workers. As always, the earlier a community begins to explore alternative employment for coal miners or power plant workers (well before a mine or plant actually closes), the smoother the transition will be.

- **Look at skills, not just positions.** Skills from one kind of industry might transition well to something that seems entirely different on the surface. For example, many former coal mine or power plant machine operators have skills that translate easily into manufacturing, alternative energies, or technology jobs. What are the skill sets in your community?
- **Pay attention to workforce development and employment policies.** A new idea for job creation may get a big boost from existing policies at the state or federal level—or may be stymied by them. Take a look at the policies that surround employment in your area, and be ready to take advantage of those that support your work, and advocate to change those that do not.
- **Think beyond your own borders.** Some of the most promising economic development strategies are those that connect towns and cities within geographic regions. Think of how the systems for food, water, recreation, conservation, energy, and other shared needs might be addressed on a regional level, and how they might translate into community jobs.
- **Prepare workers for the jobs of tomorrow.** This applies to both adults transitioning from coal-related jobs and to students preparing to enter the workforce. Look carefully at the needs of affected workers and the needs of future employers, then identify ways to close any gaps. (As mentioned above, consider gaps in terms of skills rather than industries. The gaps may not be as wide as you think.)
- **Support entrepreneurs.** From small one-person shops to fast-growing start-ups, there are many creative and visionary ideas for businesses in transitioning coal communities. What are the things your community can do to support these new ideas? Look for ways to connect local entrepreneurs to capital, resources, research, and other supports that can help them grow.

## What do we do with the closure site?

Sometimes, the property upon which a closed surface mine or power plant sits can become a tremendous asset for a community. While there will no-doubt be many great ideas about how to turn the site into something beneficial, it is critical to take your time, engage the community in discussion, and examine all options carefully.

- **Understand different perspectives.** Depending on the plans for a mine or plant after closure, the property's owners can face significant expense in terms of post-closure remediation. Ensuring that both the community and property owners understand each other's desires and perspectives can lead to a shared solution that benefits all.
- **Value the public process.** Although tension may exist, engaging all community stakeholders to discuss future plans for the site will ultimately build greater trust and confidence between the community and site owners, making it much more likely that all parties will be able to agree on a suitable new use for the site.
- **Consider the questions.** Your community and the site owner will need to consider a number of questions, and they'll all need to be answered. The most common ones include:
  - What's the history of the facility and how might it be honored?
  - What uses might help replace lost jobs or revenue?
  - How might reuse of this facility work with the community's broader economic development goals?
  - How much authority does the utility have to facilitate redevelopment efforts?
  - What are the policy goals of local/regional/state governments that will factor into the redevelopment/reuse plan?
  - Who's going to pay for the redevelopment/reuse? (Note: Many different kinds of funding will be necessary.)
- **Consider the eco assets.** Some power plants or mines own significant buffer lands that can be used for conservation easements, wetland protection or mitigation, or other purposes to offset environmental impacts of the plant or mine or the redevelopment of the site.

## What does the next generation need?

**When a mine or plant closes, it's easy to focus on the physical and economic needs.** But the stresses created by change will also activate mental health concerns that have multi-generational impact. Although these needs may seem hidden, it is critical to address these needs when planning for any community's future after coal.

**Plant or mine closures can be particularly hard on the children of those who have lost jobs.** The potential for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) either in the home or in the broader community can increase significantly. Parents can become depressed or abusive. Substance use may increase. So might rates of domestic violence and divorce. Housing or food may no longer be secure. Families may sink into poverty or even homelessness. All of these factors will have lifelong negative effects on a child's mental and physical health. The parents themselves may also have a history of ACEs that can be exacerbated by the stress of job loss and can make individual transitions difficult. This creates a twofold challenge of supporting adults whose trauma history may present extra challenges and preventing ACEs in the next generation.

**One key to combating ACEs in a community transition is to focus on reducing adversity for individuals, families, and communities by employing a number of “protective factors” during transition.**

Budget decisions that favor support for community services like schools, parks, libraries, and other assets can help reduce trauma.

Focusing on trauma and reducing ACEs will help the community keep an eye on the long term. During the transition, the community will be focused on the now. It will be difficult to think beyond the next five to 10 years. But communities in transition must think about future generations, and how the decisions made today will affect the long-term future of education, local culture and social engagement, economic mobility, and health and wellness for those who will live in the community 20, 40, or even 100 years from now.

## Evaluate

Use this checklist to make sure you are ready to move on to the solutions.

### Have you developed a shared goal?

- All stakeholder groups were involved in developing the goal.
- There is consensus on the goal.
- The goal captures the desired end state, and doesn't refer to any specific solutions.

### Have you developed metrics for your goal?

- For each goal, there is at least one metric you can use to measure your progress.
- Each metric is measurable, meaningful, and objective.
- All stakeholders agree on the metrics.

If you have checked all the boxes, it is time to move on to developing a series of solutions—then assessing them against your goals and metrics.

**At this stage, your community team should be focused on brainstorming and generating any and all ideas.** This is not the time to evaluate any ideas or cross them off the list. That will come later. An experienced facilitator should lead these brainstorming sessions, capture all ideas, steer any hint of negativity or evaluation back to positive contributions, and encourage all voices to participate.

**The list resulting from such brainstorming sessions might look like this:**

- “We could create a mountain biking trail that will attract tourism to the region.”
- “We could attract a data center by highlighting the existing infrastructure of the closing plant.”

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

### For individuals and families:

- Maintaining strong social networks.
- Eating healthy and engaging in regular exercise.
- Pursuing constructive hobbies.

### For communities:

- Employing trauma-informed practices in schools and other services.
- Providing constant communication about transition to community members to help alleviate the anxiety caused by uncertainty.
- Encouraging and preserving space for community gatherings.

- “We could become known as the ‘cheese capital’ of Ohio.”
- “We could develop a local farming economy and create a food corridor with neighboring counties.”
- “We could partner with Google to introduce the Google Career Certificates program into the local high school.”
- “We could revitalize the historic downtown to attract more tourism.”

Whatever your list looks like, it will include a mix of popular ideas that seem like a “sure thing” as well as far-flung ideas that seem unlikely to work, even outlandish. Keep an open mind and consider all ideas.

**The next step is to evaluate these alternative solutions against the metrics you developed in the previous phase.** To do this, we recommend going through each alternative solution and estimating the value of each metric defined in the previous phase. This often involves a “feasibility assessment” of the more promising ideas.



# Take Action

**Once you have established your leadership team and worked with the community to create shared goals, much of the rest of the transition-planning process can move forward—with clear objectives and with clearly stated expectations.** This type of change management has happened in many places, under a range of conditions. Examples of transition efforts are abundant. Although many are related to other types of economic change, they contain relevant ideas and lessons for communities struggling with an economic transition away from coal.

There is no endpoint in transition planning. This is an ongoing process. As new information, trends, and stakeholders emerge, you must continue to evaluate, adapt, and refine your community's plans and programs to reflect internal and external factors.

**Ready to start planning?** We're here to help. For technical assistance or to learn more, please contact Emily Rhodes at [erhodes@justtransitionfund.org](mailto:erhodes@justtransitionfund.org).