



Southeastern Kentucky: **Highlighting how a Partnership Network Can Serve Rural Communities Through Federal Funds**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, Southeastern Kentucky (SE KY) has emerged as a model for how regional, cross-sector partners can identify and bridge service gaps across a region. In 2014, eight counties in Southeastern Kentucky were designated as a Promise Zone¹ (PZ) by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PZ designation, coordinated by the Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, provides local leaders with access to technical assistance (TA) and membership in a peer network of communities as they implement strategies to achieve a set of ten goals that include: sustainable economic development, expanded access to critical health services, high-quality early education and postsecondary training, and activation of community leaders. The [full list of the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone's goals](#) and a project fact sheet is available on the US Department of Housing and Urban Development website.

Partners for Education (PFE) at Berea College, the lead educational partner for the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone, is at the nexus of this work. PFE fosters, promotes, and facilitates cross-sector partnerships across the region to support coordination of local, state, federal, and philanthropic funds that improve educational outcomes in Appalachian Kentucky. As a part of this work, PFE has secured three separate Promise Neighborhoods implementation grants for areas across the region: Clay, Jackson, and Owsley Counties in 2011; Knox County in 2016; and Perry County in 2017.

¹ Promise Zones are high poverty communities where the federal government partners with local leaders to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment, reduce violent crime, enhance public health and address other priorities identified by the community. (<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/promise-zones/promise-zones-overview/>)

This case study focuses on the following areas:

- + The complexity of working with a diverse group of stakeholders—and the challenges and benefits of that dynamic; and
- + How a fiscal mapping project helps stakeholders identify current programs and funds that support the cradle-to-career pipeline, flag any gaps in supports, and establish a revenue generation strategy to fill those gaps.

Background

The eight county region of the SE KY Promise Zone is rural in the truest sense: in 2014, the regional population was just under 32,000, with a density of 82 residents per square mile. The mining industry has moved its operations to Northeastern Kentucky, which has led to increases in local unemployment and poverty. Towns and communities are located miles apart, often linked by deteriorating roads with little or no options for public transportation, leaving the region largely disconnected from the rest of Kentucky.

This sense of isolation, though, fuels a strong commitment from neighbors and faith leaders to help those in need in their communities. Individuals and churches support weekend food backpack programs at local schools and provide access to fresh foods from their farms. Local colleges and universities also have a strong tradition of giving back to their communities—whether through training the region’s new teachers or serving as a regional hub that applies for and manages competitive grants to align and coordinate programs and services where possible.

Berea College is one of these hubs. Founded in 1855 by ardent abolitionists and radical reformers, Berea was the first interracial and coeducation college in the South. Located in the SE KY region, the college is consistently ranked as one of the leading private liberal arts colleges in the United States and charges no tuition. Its eight [Great Commitments](#) make up the moral framework that informs every action taken toward serving students, the community and the world beyond Berea. [Partners in Education at Berea College](#) was established to advance the eighth great commitment—to engage Appalachian communities, families, and students in partnership for mutual learning, growth, and service. Using a collective impact framework, PFE leverages nearly \$39 million in federal investments each year to improve educational outcomes of the region.

Aligning Multiple Funding Streams and Opportunities

PFE has been committed to a collective impact approach among key local stakeholders for nearly a decade. As a department of Berea College, PFE is able to apply for, win, and administer federal funding that many local school systems and other nonprofit organizations cannot due to limited organizational capacity.

The federal investments in the Southeastern Kentucky Promise Zone support children and families from birth until they go on to college and career, providing programs and services that enhance early literacy skill development, increase access to arts experiences, embed AmeriCorps and VISTA members in local organizations, and help youth explore high-skill career opportunities. However, in this environment, when federal and state legislators are looking to curtail budgets and expenditures, PFE's leadership has realized it is crucial to identify other sources to sustain and maximize existing federal programs and services.

Lessons Learned from Southeastern Kentucky:

- + Conduct regular fiscal and asset mapping studies to understand the full range of federal, state, and local investments in your community.
- + Activate local leaders to drive buy-in from community organizations around the fiscal mapping process

FISCAL MAPPING

While the Promise Zone designation did not come with funding, it came with something equally valuable—access to technical experts to support the management of collective impact processes, development of collaborative networks, and sustaining and financing of cradle-to-career systems of support. PFE utilized this expertise to begin building an understanding of current local, state, philanthropic, and federal support that other agencies and entities leverage throughout the PZ. PFE is using this information to design a strategic plan that aims to diversify the funding base for cradle-to-career initiatives across SE KY.

PFE focused its fiscal mapping efforts on identifying and improving educational outcomes that support children from birth to age 24. The goal of the mapping project is to ensure counties and organizations within the PZ are accessing all available federal, state, and local public dollars; maximizing the use of those dollars within the community; and minimizing duplication of services.

Due to the project's large number of partners and funding streams, and vast geography, PFE opted to pilot the study approach in the Knox County Promise Neighborhood, where it could use the fiscal map to coordinate and maximize funds that advance its five result areas:

1. All children enter kindergarten ready to learn;
2. All students are academically proficient;
3. All children and youth are supported in school and out of school.
4. All young people graduate from high school.
5. All youth receive a degree beyond high school.

The results of this pilot effort will inform changes in the process as fiscal mapping is conducted in the seven other counties of the Promise Zone.

INTEGRATING LESSONS LEARNED INTO THE APPROACH

PFE has conducted fiscal mapping and asset mapping projects in the past, integrating lessons learned through those experiences into this more recent mapping effort. For example, it learned some stakeholders are reluctant to share information about the funding they receive with other agencies within the community. To counter this concern, PFE provided agencies and organizations within the fiscal mapping project a partially completed spreadsheet template with known funding sources.

Using the [Federal Fiscal Mapping Tool](#) as a model, PFE designed a data collection tool that provides both descriptive data and analytic information (see right). The descriptive data identifies the funding streams currently leveraged in Knox County while the analytic data reveals opportunities to maximize and better coordinate dollars. This approach netted mixed results. Partners more familiar with PFE and the fiscal mapping process forwarded the requested information, while those with less of a connection to PFE did not share data. PFE compiled the data it did collect into a single spreadsheet, which we shared and discussed with Knox County Promise Neighborhood stakeholders at a Data Walk meeting in summer 2017.

Descriptive metrics include grant or program name; type and amount of funding; duration; dates of funding; eligibility

Analytic metrics address:

Who provides the service? Is the funding being maximized? Are there opportunities for coordination? Are there barriers to use? What is the stability or sustainability of the funds?

While the main objective of the meeting was to review and discuss the data collected as well as to present an initial analysis, the convening also provided an opportunity to learn of the underlying causes behind incomplete data collection. Over the course of the meeting, PFE staff learned that some respondents did not clearly understand how they would benefit from the fiscal mapping process—or

how the data collected could inform more aligned funding of county level programs that address the five Promise Neighborhood result areas in Knox County. PFE is now revisiting the process they use to request data, focusing time and effort on educating community members about how this work serves core outcomes. As they roll the fiscal mapping project out to other PZ counties, PFE will augment the written cover letter and directions with a follow-up phone call to answer questions and provide clarification regarding the intended uses of data.

DATA ANALYSIS

PFE leveraged technical assistance to help analyze the data and facilitate a Data Walk with staff and stakeholders. A Data Walk engages project stakeholders in a conversation about themes that emerge in the data and what those themes mean for the region's collective impact work. Our technical assistance team served as external facilitators, guiding the conversation at the Data Walk meeting. We brought an outside perspective as well as experience and knowledge of other approaches to aligning local, state, and federal funding to support collective impact initiatives. In some cases, it is difficult for a member of a collective impact collaborative to facilitate discussions about funding without being seen as a competitor. An external facilitator, rather than an involved organization, can be useful as a neutral voice advocating for improved results.

In the case of the first version of the Knox County fiscal map, the Data Walk revealed a significant investment in college and career preparation, as compared to more limited resources invested in supports for children and youth ages 5-16. Funding for youth development and enrichment programs outside the school day was also extremely limited, prompting further study and data collection in that area. Stakeholders noted a possible opportunity to better coordinate and pool funds to maximize private and philanthropic investment, aligning those with resources available through the Child and Adult Food Care Program.

Now that PFE has piloted localized fiscal mapping in Knox County, it intends to apply lessons learned to future fiscal mapping efforts in counties beyond Knox, identifying and leveraging additional funds in the region beyond large federal grants such as GEAR UP, Upward Bound Math and Science, Full Service Community Schools, and AmeriCorps. When fiscal mapping is completed, PFE will better understand:

- ✦ The full array of cradle to career supports offered across the Promise Zone;
- ✦ The percentage of supports and services that are wholly funded by federal investment;
- ✦ The opportunities to better coordinate and align existing funding and programs; and
- ✦ The level of private and philanthropic investment needed in the region to better balance federal, state, local, and private investment across SE Kentucky.

The Road Ahead

PFE currently leverages 17 different federal grants that support core goals across the service region. In Knox, Clay, Jackson, and Owsley counties alone, it coordinates the braiding of up to six different large-scale federal grants that underscore a cohesive continuum of cradle-to-career services for youth. However, these funds are time-limited and many are targeted to be reduced or eliminated in the next federal budget. In this uncertain funding environment, PFE is looking to build on its strong partnerships with public and private organizations to ensure the sustainability of its efforts.

When it comes to the federal, state, and local funds that remain available and can support the five PFE results in the Knox County Promise Neighborhoods, PFE aims to work more closely within the local Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) and with cross-sector partners including Grad Nation, Save the Children and KCEOC Community Action. In addition, the organization also hopes to better leverage and expand use of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds that can support the “college and career” portion of the education continuum. Partnerships such as these, coordinated by an entity like PFE, present opportunities to further align funding and maximize impact across a continuum of services.