

Appalachian Energy Futures

The University of Tennessee

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Appalachian Energy Futures Grant Period: February 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

Grantee Name: The University of Tennessee Project Director: Dr. Tim Ezzell

Description of Project:

For the 2011 ATP project, students from the University of Tennessee explored the future of the Appalachian energy industry. As the region's coal resources decline and become more costly to extract, students felt it was necessary to create a new and more sustainable energy portfolio for the region. Students also sought to offset economic impacts and job losses that may result for the impending regional coal transition. Working with three representative case study communities from the region, the students developed a number of proposed policies to create economic growth and clean energy throughout the ARC region.

Activities:

Students conducted extensive research on three case study counties:

- Greene County, PA – A community at the epicenter of the Marcellus Shale fracking industry
- Pike County, KY- The so-called “capital” of the Kentucky Coal Belt
- Noxubee County, MS – An economically distressed community with few jobs and a large African-American population

Students developed profiles for each community and interviewed local stakeholders about local issues and possible energy opportunities. They then assessed various energy resources and developed policy recommendations for each project community.

In November, 2011 the students then presented these ideas at a forum at the Baker Center for Public Policy on the UT campus. At the forum students presented community profiles and discussed their findings with energy policy experts from UT and Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Using input from these experts, students then refined their ideas to develop final policy recommendations.

Student presented these final policy recommendations at the ATP conference in December.

Project Outcomes:

Students organized and facilitated a governance workshop at the Baker Center that included local and national experts, representatives from local, state, and federal agencies, and elected officials.

Students presented their research and findings at the ATP meeting in Washington and at the Baker Center in Knoxville.

Students developed and presented a poster at the ATP meeting in Washington.

Students shared results from the project with workshop participants and other stakeholders. Each student team prepared a county-specific report. These reports were shared with stakeholders, including local community contacts.

Problems Encountered:

This year, the UT class assessed region-wide energy policy issues. While this ambitious approach was very rewarding and edifying, it also presented significant challenges. The limited budget and distances between communities made community engagement difficult and students relied on indirect forms of communication.

Future classes will likely be more Tennessee-specific. Given the value of region wide policy research, however, it might be useful to experiment with alternative forms of communication, like webcasting, to improve long-distance engagement efforts.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

Students shared project findings with local stakeholders. The student reports included next steps and funding opportunities, to assist local officials interested in implementing recommendations. Results from this project will be incorporated into the 2012 ATP project, which will assess policy barriers to local economic development in the region's small rural communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Final policy ideas included the following:

Greene County, PA

The students recommended development of a local biomass program and construction of a cellulosic ethanol processing plant. They also encouraged the adoption of combined heat and power systems and increased investments in workforce development programs.

Pike County, KY

The students recommended an expansion of Pikeville University through the creation of a scholarship fund for miner's families. They also recommended the establishment of a green energy degree program at the college and the construction of a green dormitory on the Pikeville University campus. Lastly, the students advocated the creation of a switchgrass harvesting program through a private/public partnership.

Noxubee County, MS

The students recommended the construction of a large scale solar energy facility in the county and the promotion of biomass or methane capture energy production among local agricultural producers. To create the necessary workforce for these industries, the students also advocated sweeping educational reforms in the local school system and improved workforce development programs.

Attachments: