



The 2018 Community Leadership Academy (CLA) was held over three days in April with 200 attendees overall. *Igniting Investments for our Future* was the theme and session topic tracks included Good Governance, Economic Strategy and Leadership. As part of the CLA, a presentation was provided on **WV Forward** – a blueprint for our state’s prosperity based on data from McKinsey & Company. Among other recommendations, the research indicated that developing tourism and showcasing West Virginia’s assets were good opportunities for growing revenue, jobs, and community development. WV Forward is advancing those efforts by working with our state’s leaders to shape next steps. CLA participants provided thoughtful recommendations in a facilitated discussion.

Contributors included 135 leaders representing county and city, economic authority, family resource organizations, university faculty and students, WV community development organizations, businesses, Mainstreet leaders, library system, coalfield development groups and non-profits. Break out sessions discussed ways to develop tourism and promote West Virginia as a place to play, live and work. The groups reported written and verbal feedback on (1) West Virginia’s assets: What people love about West Virginia? What makes West Virginia unique, meaningful, or intrinsic? (2) Community development opportunities: How do we ensure our communities are set up to succeed in preparing for new visitors, residents, and business? The top four most popular responses are noted in each category below.

The results will be used to focus efforts of WV Forward.

ASSETS

What do you love about West Virginia? What makes West Virginia unique, meaningful, or intrinsic?

- *Sense of pride and kinship shared by West Virginians**
- *The natural beauty, landscape and nature**
- *Sense of unity and community**
- *Welcoming and friendly culture**
- Outdoor recreation
- Low crime rates
- Peaceful, wide-open spaces
- Lack of materialism – people are centered on what’s important in life
- Sense of belonging/community
- Generations of hardworking families

*Represents the most popular responses that appeared numerous times from the respondents.



- Cost of living is low
- The quality of air and water is environmentally sound
- Strong traditional values
- Mountaineers
- Oil/gas/natural resources are in abundance
- Accessible to major cities while maintaining natural landscape
- Deep rooted heritage and identity
- West Virginia experiences all 4 seasons
- Appalachian culture and arts
- Limited urban growth
- Pepperoni rolls/Moonshine
- Blue collar state
- Healthy place to live
- Slower pace of life
- Grass roots
- Compassion
- Access to leadership
- Cultural spirit
- Unique WV made products
- Strong work ethic
- Military support and patriotism
- Family oriented
- Small town charm
- Strong heritage that is rich in history
- Faith based culture
- Mountains
- Singing "Country Roads"
- Historic downtowns
- Higher education opportunities
- Solitude

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

How do we ensure our communities are set up to succeed in preparing for new visitors residents or business?

- *Road/infrastructure improvements (including rail and sidewalks)**
- *Wi-Fi/internet accessibility**

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- *Beautifying the communities (including code enforcement and abate abandoned properties)**
- *Safe, affordable housing**
- We need more restaurants that cater to dietary restrictions (vegan/vegetarian/gluten-free/Kosher)
- Mobile phone signal service improvements
- Better signs to help visitors know where they are and where they are going
- More places to stay (bed and breakfasts, hotels, rental properties)
- Need to encourage people to welcome new people, transient workers and tourists
- Walkability and public transportation improvements
- Hospitality training for restaurant and hotel workers
- The need for indoor recreational/sports complexes to make communities more appealing
- Continue to build sense of pride
- Improve education for our youth
- Invest in quality of life to try to retain people to stay here
- Protect our environmental assets
- Stress the importance of healthy living
- Support local businesses and low income entrepreneurs
- Need clean up regulations in communities that are enforced
- Make communities more elderly and ADA friendly
- Create and maintain trails and camping sites
- Enforce building codes and permitting
- Communities need to have restaurants and entertainment
- Need a balance between people, environment, and economy
- Increase state, county, and city collaborations
- Riverfront development
- Coordination with hospitality programs
- Treatment facilities/substance abuse programs
- Rebranding – need to change the way people view West Virginians
- Have better parking
- Increase educational funding
- Increase jobs that will need filled (hospitality, contractors, caretakers, etc.)
- Improve existing jobs and create opportunities
- Improve maintenance of city parks and open spaces
- Embrace diversity

*Represents the most popular responses that appeared numerous times from the respondents.



- Create more activities for families
- Customer service training

- Need for better arts, music, and food
- Need to remove or renovate abandoned buildings
- Encourage communities to look at their messaging
- Continue to build a sense of pride in West Virginia
- Provide new visitors a welcome packet with information on what is in the community, maps, relevant phone numbers
- Host an event highlighting local stores, shops, and companies
- Promote local farms/farmers (Farmers Markets)
- West Virginians need to educate themselves on what West Virginia has to offer to be able to share that proudly with others
- Create a theme park to draw tourists in
- Host more fairs and festivals
- Preserve our history
- Broadcast opportunities to draw people here
- The need for more indoor activities for rainy days and winter months
- Encourage recycling

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