FAQs

What is West Virginia Forward?
A blueprint with a host of recommendations and ideas to advance West Virginia’s economic future, West Virginia Forward began as an unprecedented collaboration between West Virginia University, the West Virginia Department of Commerce and Marshall University. This partnership has developed into a larger, statewide effort to identify West Virginia's unique assets and pair them with economic trends that will leverage growth and development opportunities to strengthen and diversify all regions of the state.

With a sharp focus on short- and long-term objectives, and a refined vision, the partners are working alongside key stakeholders and experts across West Virginia and beyond. So far, innovative solutions and opportunities include advancing West Virginia’s workforce, business climate, educational opportunities, community development, energy sector, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship and infrastructure.

With a shared vision, we are advancing our state into prosperity, energizing even more partnerships while blazing a new path toward improving West Virginia’s economic future. Our efforts, already under way, truly affect every West Virginian.

Why is West Virginia Forward important?
West Virginia continues to face a challenged economy with regional struggles. We need to find new career opportunities where jobs have disappeared. We need to retain talent in the midst of employees leaving the state they love to pursue opportunity. We need to embrace all opportunities before us and believe that we can create a new path forward. This is not about rising from the bottom of a poll or stat. This is about optimizing success by building on the assets we already have, identifying new sectors for growth, finding disruptive trends, considering our regional impact and finding quick wins. It’s about moving West Virginia Forward.

Why was McKinsey & Company chosen to do the analysis?
McKinsey & Company is a global management consulting firm that serves leading businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations and not-for-profits. We worked with McKinsey & Company due to their expertise and success in providing the critical information organizations need to create change.

How was the data collected?
In 2017, working groups with staff from West Virginia University, the Department of Commerce and McKinsey & Company compiled data and met with state business experts, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Guard, Vision Shared, Imagine, the Business Roundtable, Tech Connect and Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation to ensure we gained feedback from a variety of economic development partners.

Who are the other partners involved in this project?
In 2017, working groups with staff from West Virginia University, the Department of Commerce and McKinsey & Company worked with experts and stakeholders inside and outside of West Virginia. We met with lawmakers, economic development experts, community leaders, educators, business owners, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Guard, Vision Shared, Imagine, the Business Roundtable, Tech Connect, Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation and others to solicit feedback from stakeholders across the state. To help capture the opportunities identified by McKinsey & Company, West Virginia University and the West Virginia Department of Commerce invited Marshall University to participate, and together, created West Virginia Forward to turn McKinsey & Company’s summary of findings’ recommendations into action to benefit West Virginia’s economy.

What areas of growth are being considered?
While all possibilities are being considered, a few key opportunities include workforce, business climate, education, community development, entrepreneurship and infrastructure. In the past, the state and other organizations have addressed specific areas of concern. However, this collaborative partnership looks at West Virginia’s assets from a global perspective and pairs them with economic trends we can leverage for future growth. The report is specific to West Virginia. The state has phenomenal assets, such as a healthy business climate, a favorable state business tax index rating compared to neighboring states, and a dedicated, low-turnover workforce. But we are looking at what business sectors are most likely to grow in the coming years and determining if we have the right attributes to attract them here.

How will this be different than other reports the State has done?
McKinsey & Company’s written product is a distilled summary of findings serving to spot new issues, dig beneath existing challenges and highlight the importance of ongoing work. It is specific to West Virginia and our current economic landscape, and addresses an implementation plan. The summary of findings was not meant to be a lengthy, comprehensive report with silver bullet solutions. Rather, the report is designed to point the conversation while recognizing that there is no substitute for including those with frontline intel to craft solutions together. Collaboration that leverages partnerships with state and regional leaders is the heart of the West Virginia Forward effort.
**What are the next steps?**

West Virginia University, the West Virginia Department of Commerce and Marshall University entered into a Memorandum of Understanding, which formalized the partnership. A Steering Committee is tasked at setting overall direction, prioritizing initiatives and directing stakeholder outreach. Working groups are being established, when appropriate, to focus on key areas identified by the summary of findings. They will fulfill one of three roles:

1. Handle time-sensitive issues, including legislative items and deadlines.
2. Work on efforts already in progress and align them with West Virginia Forward goals.
3. Grapple with big issues that need the most effort.

**Who are members of the Steering Committee and how were they chosen?**

The Steering Committee is made up of one representative nominated from each partner organization, as well as two jointly-appointed members at large, who were engaged early in the process and have dedicated time and resources to West Virginia’s economic development.

The Steering Committee members were chosen for their range of experience, their passion and their insights into our state, the economy and innovative ways for us to move West Virginia Forward. They will help guide and support our work as we pivot to implementing solutions.

Steering Committee members:
- Marty Becker, BrickStreet Insurance
- Patrick Farrell, Savage Grant, Service Pump and Supply, Marshall University
- Pat Getty, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
- Jennifer Giovannitti, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
- Jim Pennington, The Health Plan

**How are the working groups formed and how are members selected to participate in a working group?**

Working groups will be formed to tackle McKinsey & Company’s proposed action items. Established experts in key fields will join together to employ a data-driven, nonpartisan and inclusive approach. Beginning with narrowly drawn questions that reflect the specific challenges that the summary of findings identified, volunteer experts will generate recommendations for solutions.

The working groups’ efforts will be disciplined through a project management approach that values both the integrity of the process and the timeliness of deliverables. Working groups will fulfill one of three roles:

1. Handle time-sensitive issues, including legislative items and deadlines.
2. Work on efforts already in progress and align them with West Virginia Forward goals.
3. Grapple with big issues that need the most effort.
How is West Virginia Forward defining success? How is success measured?
West Virginia Forward’s working groups will be tasked to determine what touchpoints will be viewed as measurable “wins,” although success stories will come in all shapes and sizes and occur in all corners of West Virginia.

How much is the West Virginia Forward movement costing taxpayers?
Nothing. The research and summary was paid for through the support of private donors and foundations.

How can I stay informed?
If you would like to receive updates on West Virginia Forward, volunteer or have an idea, you can email wvforward@mail.wvu.edu. Please refer to West Virginia Forward’s website for the latest updates, projects and progress.

What general themes will West Virginia Forward focus on in 2018?
Collaborative efforts in finding new ways to revitalize the economy and our workforce by taking a hard look at both opportunities and challenges to advance West Virginia into prosperity will be a major theme in all initiatives.

In addition, we need a business-friendly climate to facilitate long-term economic growth; we need to strengthen our future talent pool as an evolving workforce requires a dynamic educational system; we need to reinvent ourselves, building startups and embracing an entrepreneurial mindset to seize opportunities; we need to leverage ways to create a healthy, educated and prepared workforce; we need to be innovative and disruptive to help curb the national opioid epidemic; and we need to take advantage of Marcellus shale and opportunities that come along with it.

What are West Virginia Forward’s priorities during 2018?
We look forward to working with leadership and the legislative body, and hope that the Governor and the Legislature will view West Virginia Forward as a blueprint, embracing the recommendations and ideas put forth in the summary of findings to uncover the best solutions for one, united West Virginia.

2018 West Virginia Forward priorities:
→ Establishing a site readiness process to ensure West Virginia remains competitive.
→ Expanding tourism statewide and rebranding West Virginia.
→ Finding a commonsense, bipartisan solution to tangible personal property taxes.

Larger-scale priorities we are beginning to discuss:
→ Working to boost West Virginia’s productivity and improve the talent pipeline.
→ Taking advantage of Marcellus shale and opportunities that come along with it.
  o Enhancing and developing West Virginia’s energy portfolios, particularly in the petrochemical industry and development of an Appalachian storage hub,
which can lead to an increase in gas drilling, chemical production, manufacturing and end-user distribution.

- Supporting manufacturing opportunities and economic diversification.
  → Continuing to expand STEM education and research.
  → Finding solutions to ensure electricity costs remain low.

**What if the topic or issue that I think West Virginia needs to focus on is not listed in McKinsey & Company’s summary of findings?**

The summary of findings was not meant to be a lengthy, comprehensive report with silver bullet solutions. Rather, the findings were designed to point our conversation while recognizing that there is no substitute for including those with frontline intel to craft solutions together.

Some of the issues spotted in the summary of findings may not seem surprising. However, the fact that McKinsey & Company flags certain issues should challenge us to address those in innovative ways to attain the results we want and need. In other areas, McKinsey & Company gives us a fresh perspective, spots new trends or gives us tips on better marketing our successes so external perception is aligned with our progress.

**How will West Virginia Forward help advance the development of the Appalachia Storage and Trading Hub?**

Since West Virginia is already investing in this $10+ billion infrastructure project that will expand the market for ethane and other natural gas liquids production from Marcellus and Utica shale formations, the storage hub is not listed in the summary of findings. We asked McKinsey & Company to only evaluate data and reveal new recommendations to help bolster economic development and not waste time, capital and resources looking into investments that are already under way. However, the Appalachia Storage and Trading Hub is a part of West Virginia Forward since it does just that. This investment will lead to an economic revitalization of the Appalachian Basin, bringing in multibillion-dollar investments and creating thousands of jobs. It will include opportunities for welcoming new business development into the region from international and stateside companies, while enhancing natural gas exploration and production companies, midstream gas companies and suppliers and downstream chemical producers and other manufacturers.