

Appalachian School Proposal

“Land Skills and Traditional Crafts”

August 2026

Vision and Rationale

Several different native Highlanders have long wanted to develop a school within the County that would pass on traditional skills and crafts to future generations. Some want to teach skills for living off the land. Others want to preserve traditional arts & crafts. What these have in common is a desire to:

1. Preserve local Appalachian culture through teaching and apprenticeship (Legacy)
2. Equip young people and interested adults to live well economically and socially in our unique Allegheny Highlands location (Equipping)
3. Increase appreciation and care for our beautiful natural landscape (Love of Place)
4. Enrich the way of life of the people of the Highland region, and educate interested guests in the rich contributions we have to offer (Joy)

Proposal

Representatives from The Highland Center, The 3rd Space, and The Allegheny Mountain Institute (the “Coordinating Team”) together propose the development of a community-based Appalachian School in Highland County that celebrates, preserves, and transmits the region's rich traditions of agriculture, foodways, forestry, arts, music, and artisanal craft. The School will organize itself in such a way as to economically benefit those living in the County.

1. Instructors for workshops and training tracks will generally be individuals resident in the County [or one of the four contiguous neighboring counties: Pendleton, Pocahontas, Augusta, or Bath].
2. The entire County serves as the classroom. Rather than workshops being taught in a centralized location, they would instead happen in whatever environment is most suitable to the skill or craft being taught.
3. Residents who either own a rental lodge or are willing to host a guest in their house may opt to partner with the Appalachian School so that individuals can book housing at the time they register for a course. Coordinated workshop registration and lodging increase the ability of many guests to attend.

Name

The Coordinating Team recommends that the Appalachian School have a name that reflects our geographic area and unique culture without being confused with existing organizations. Attendees at the Community Dinner on August 15th will have an opportunity to weigh in on what the name of the Appalachian School should be.

Benefits for the Highland County community

- Instructors already exist in the county. We pay our own people.
- Increased knowledge and skill level in instructional areas.
- Housing hosts get lodgers.
- Restaurants get customers (dinner).
- Other services visited (like Hayfields State Park).
- Community members can participate in the public social events (like evening dances).
- Opportunities for life-long learning.

Collaborator Roles and Areas of Focus

Representatives from the Coordinating Team not-for-profit organizations are willing to take on the behind-the-scenes work necessary to bring this vision to life. We are committed to a collaborative, non-competitive spirit and therefore have made an effort to ensure that each collaborator contributes according to its strengths in ways that do not conflict with each other or existing programs.

Nuts & Bolts: How It Works Practically

- Topics are taught in short workshops, either 3 or 5 days.
- Three or four workshops can be taught in parallel during the same week.
- There could be an initial gathering, registration and orientation on opening day.
- Participants then disperse to their housing and instructional sites, and spend the workshop time at the sites.
- The last day there may be a closing gathering of some type (meal?) and opportunity to share/show each other what was made or learned.
- Lodging: Local residents may opt to partner with the Appalachian School to provide housing. When individuals register for a course, they would be given the option to sign up for housing at the same time. Housing would be priced separately from the course.
- A set tuition (to be determined) is charged to the registrant.
- Instructional sites get a percentage of the tuition to pay the instructor and cover their site costs.
- Individual classes can add a materials fee if needed.
- Instructors can require a minimum attendance.

July 2026 - Summer 2027: Pilot Year

Goal: Demonstrate the value and potential of a coordinated Appalachian School through a collaborative pilot program. A secondary goal is to demonstrate what a coordinated effort could look like and produce.

- Community Input Dinner on August 15th to introduce the Appalachian School project
- Secure start-up grant funding
- Developing marketing plan and materials for 2027
- Initial workshops offered in 2027

Future Steps: Expansion and Visibility

- Increase number of weeks per year workshops are offered
- Invite additional community organizations to partner
- Offer at least one workshop in every season