



# IMPACT 2025 REPORT



Mountain  
Association



“ It is a **beautiful** thing to witness the work that many hands can **accomplish**, even in the darkest of times. ”

## A Letter From Our **President**

Friends,

It is a beautiful thing to witness the work that many hands can accomplish, even in the darkest of times. In the last year, we have seen our staff, partners, and local leaders mobilizing their efforts to meet the needs of the day for our mountain communities. This year, Appalachian Kentuckians again faced the many impacts of two major flood events that affected multiple counties, followed by an EF4 tornado that tore through Somerset and London. Our communities have been through a lot, and these disasters most certainly won't be the last to disrupt our lives.

Thankfully, we have spent the last few years preparing our services to best support small businesses, nonprofits, and local governments through hard times. And, with the publication of our new five-year strategic plan this past spring, we are further cemented in our role of advancing a new economy here that is more resilient to change, in every sense of the word. Our staff have worked tirelessly to lay the groundwork for this new economy, whether that be through lending flexible capital to help an established business endure economic hardships brought on by disaster, or developing new, hands-on methods of technical assistance to support entrepreneurs in the beginning stages of launching a business.

The volume of good work done across the region this past year is impossible to capture in one report—we would need several! Yet, we invite you to read on and share our pride in another successful year of supporting the prosperity of our beloved region.

With gratitude,

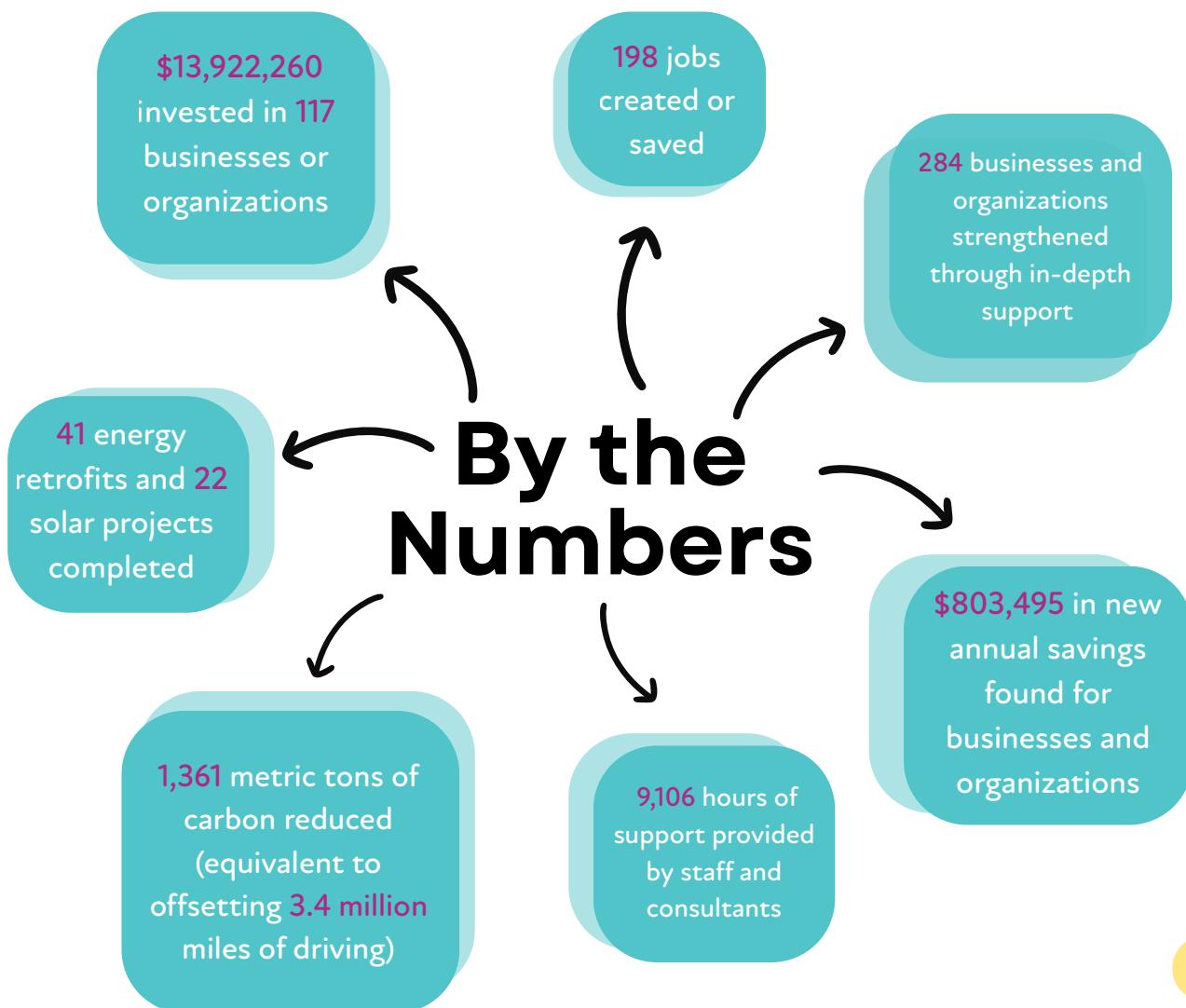
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robin".

Robin Gabbard

# A Year In Review

For nearly 50 years, the Mountain Association has worked in Appalachian Kentucky to build a new economy and a brighter future. In the last year, we leveraged technical expertise, communications, and capital to support people, businesses, and communities in the region. Our Lending Team deployed over \$13.9 million in flexible capital to small businesses representing a variety of industries ranging from food and agriculture to childcare. And, to amplify the impact of this capital, our Business Support and Energy Teams assisted business owners and community leaders with much-needed technical assistance.

We facilitated solar installations and energy efficiency upgrades on facilities essential to the wellbeing of communities, such as grocery stores and family service centers, and brought in grant funding to offset the costs of these projects for our clients. Additionally, we testified and engaged with decision-makers to support policies that support a better energy future in Eastern Kentucky – from more affordable utility rates to protections from disconnections. Through the Community Accelerator program, we partnered with What's Next EKY!? to help strengthen and grow resilient communities by helping design and carry out local projects. Our SPARK program continued to support small nonprofits with the resources needed to sustain their vital work and critical services.



# Client Features



David, Ky

## St. Vincent Mission

From what was once a coal camp swimming pool, St. Vincent Mission has served Appalachians since 1968.

They launched the county's first food pantry, a childcare center, and home repair service. Today, they also offer disaster relief, workforce development, and a garden program. With so many programs, it's easy to get buried in overhead. After the historic floods of 2022, we supported their work with an expert on a system that has allowed them to streamline their operations without losing their personal touch.



Irvine, Ky

## Red Haven Farm

Sandy Ross and Martin Caruana run this 540-acre farm offering stays, pastured meat, and even guided agate tours. They were living in Michigan until 2021 when the mountains called. Though they had no experience farming, they're the 'figure it out' type. Martin, who described Sandy as 'fearless,' loves animals and tinkering. This combination has allowed them to take abandoned land and transform it. Along with affordable financing, we also supported them with marketing strategies.



Williamsburg, Ky

## Diane Taylor Roberts

For years, Diane Taylor Roberts filled a manuscript with short stories about growing up in Appalachia. Like many aspiring authors, she had a dream of publishing, but no roadmap. By working with a Mountain Association business coach, she completed market research and financial planning to chart a path forward. Ultimately, she decided to self-publish, securing a microloan from us to bring her book to life—which sold 500 copies in just its first three months!

## Opell Meats

This small butcher shop has stood the test of time, serving farmers and families for over fifty years. What began in 1969 with Bill Opell is now carried forward by his granddaughter, Laura, and her husband, Brad. When her aunt and uncle closed the shop in 2022, Laura - who served as an Extension Agent - found herself fielding calls from farmers desperate for a butcher. With our financing and accounting training, they reopened Opell Meats, once again providing a crucial community service.



## Martin Co. Health Dept.

When Eric Mills became Martin County's public health director, he faced rising energy costs, an aging fleet, and limited funding. Drawing on private-sector experience, he pursued solar and electric vehicles, leveraging expertise from the Mountain Association to navigate tax credits, grants, and local support. Now, with solar, EVs and a battery back up, they are set to save around \$30,000 annually, which they are reinvesting into hiring staff and expanding programs like diabetes care and family planning.



# Looking Ahead

Our new strategic plan that takes us through 2030 embraces providing additional support to help critical businesses, nonprofits, and local government entities sustain themselves and the services they provide. With the strategies of flexible lending, in-depth technical assistance services, and creative program development, the Mountain Association will continue to build local wealth and the vibrancy of local economies.

While we will continue to support a broad set of enterprises, we will prioritize our work on the following sectors:

- ▶ Affordable and Available Housing
- ▶ Quality Childcare
- ▶ Healthy Food Access
- ▶ Resiliency and Disaster Recovery



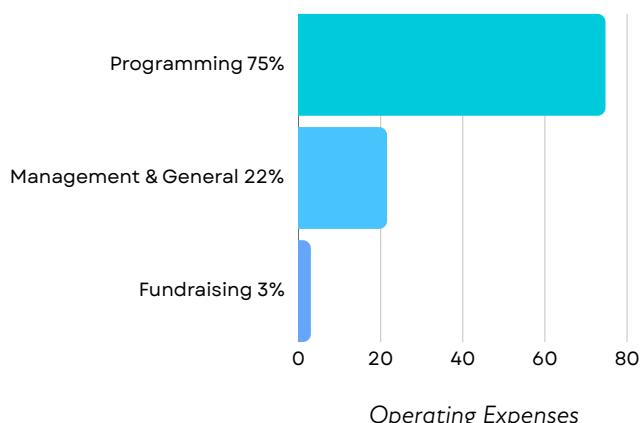
## Owl's Treehouse

New childcare centers are often passion driven startups that face steep challenges, from thin margins and strict regulations to limited revenue models. In Owsley County - one of Eastern Kentucky's biggest childcare deserts - OCARE opened Owl's Treehouse in Spring 2025 with support from the Mountain Association. Through low-interest financing, technical assistance, and specialized financial training, OCARE strengthened operations, improved financial clarity, and prepared for sustainable growth. This partnership not only positions Owl's Treehouse for success but also provided us with better insights on how we can better support childcare centers over the coming years.

# Financials

The majority of Mountain Association's funding, including fiscal sponsorships, comes from private grants and contributions (41%), followed by government grants (30%), and financing revenue, including interest and fees (22%), and other revenue, including program income (7%). We dedicate most of our spending to our programmatic work.

Full financials are available on our website.



# Affiliates



Kentucky Natural Lands Trust celebrated three decades of wildlands conservation this year. Formed to protect the largest remaining old growth forest in Kentucky in 1995, KNLT has grown to protect nearly 100 square miles of wildlands across the region through the power of partnerships. Protected wildlands safeguard biodiversity, sustain communities and stabilize the climate. This year's conservation wins:

- ▶ Doubled the size of Hurricane Gap Preserve on Pine Mountain
- ▶ Safeguarded wildlands along the unfolding Great Eastern Trail route
- ▶ Established the new Limestone Gap Preserve in Bell County



The Kentucky Center for Economic Policy conducts sound, credible analysis of key policy issues in the commonwealth and collaborates with partners to develop and advance policy solutions that make lasting improvements. In FY25, KyPolicy helped defeat a constitutional amendment allowing public money to go to private schools and pushed back against harmful federal cuts to safety net programs, among other activities.

- ▶ 55 meetings with decision makers and public officials
- ▶ 8 media mentions per week
- ▶ 41 policy analyses published

## Our Supporters

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