



Helping Communities Leverage Their Outdoor Recreation Assets

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NEWS RELEASE

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Southeast Ohio Takes Center Stage at National Economic Development Conference in Washington, D.C.

ORCA Fellow to Present Original Cross-Sector Partnership Strategy to Federal Agencies and Economic Development Leaders

NELSONVILLE, Ohio – February 24, 2026 – The Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA) announces that original research developed through its partnership with the Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) will be presented at the ERC Capstone Expo in Washington, D.C. this week, held in conjunction with the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Leadership Conference. The findings are documented in "Building Successful Cross-Sector Partnerships: A Framework from Ohio Corporate Social Responsibility Leaders," an executive brief soon to be made available through ORCA's website and partner network.

The research will be presented by Jess Leibson, ORCA's ERC Fellow, before an audience that includes the IEDC, ERC economic development host organizations and Fellows from across the nation, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce Alejandra Castillo, and federal partners including the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties. The Economic Recovery Corps is funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Leibson's forums convened corporate sustainability and CSR leaders from companies headquartered or operating in Ohio. Together, forum participants identified cross-sector partnerships that have mobilized over \$20 million across Cleveland, Columbus, and Southeast Ohio.

"During my fellowship interview, I gave my word that I would serve as a bridge across sectors. I stated that if corporations, nonprofits, and public agencies worked together, they could achieve far more than they could alone," said Leibson. "Ohio's leaders proved that. Thanks to Southeast



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Ohio's ORCA led by Jessie Powers, I am proud that we can now bring those insights to a national audience."

Leibson brings an uncommon depth of cross-sector experience to the work. A Cleveland native currently based in Columbus, she holds an M.S. in Community Economic Development and has managed corporate social responsibility reporting and communications for multiple Fortune 500 companies, including EY, Berry Global (now Amcor), and Amazon Web Services. Her earlier career in public service spanned the City of Twinsburg, Summit County, and the Ohio Treasurer's Office.

ORCA is currently leveraging insights from the forums to explore nature-based education programming for underserved communities, while remaining aligned with Ohio's environmental and education priorities. Further updates, including expanded findings and statewide partnership highlights, will be announced in the coming weeks.

About ORCA: The Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA) is a council of governments advancing outdoor recreation, regional collaboration, and community development across South and Southeast Ohio. ORCA develops and manages the Baileys Trail System and leads cross-sector initiatives that strengthen the region and Ohio's outdoor recreation sector through nature-based investment. Learn more at www.orcaohio.com.

About the Economic Recovery Corps: The Economic Recovery Corps is a collaborative initiative designed to accelerate economic recovery in distressed communities by connecting organizations with talent and capacity for transformative economic development. ERC is funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) under the CARES Act and led by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC).

About Jess Leibson: Jess Leibson is an Economic Recovery Corps Fellow hosted by ORCA. A published children's author and certified Master Naturalist, she has built a career bridging journalism, public service, Fortune 500 communications, and conservation, bringing that rare cross-sector fluency to her work in Southeast Ohio.

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