



Helping Communities Leverage Their Outdoor Recreation Assets

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ohio's Corporate and Conservation Leaders Unite to Shape National Economic Development Strategy

ORCA-Convened Forums Bring Together Fortune 500 Companies, Major Nonprofits, and Public Agencies to Build Replicable Cross-Sector Partnership Models

NELSONVILLE, Ohio – June 2, 2026 – The The Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA) has released "Building Successful Cross-Sector Partnerships: A Framework from Ohio Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Leaders," an executive brief documenting insights from two CSR Community Forums convened by ORCA in partnership with the Economic Recovery Corps. The findings were recently presented by ORCA Economic Recovery Corps Fellow Jess Leibson at the ERC Capstone Expo in Washington, D.C., held in conjunction with the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Leadership Conference.

Session One convened corporate sustainability and CSR leaders from Amcor, the world's largest packaging manufacturer with facilities across Ohio; American Electric Power, one of the largest electric utilities in the United States and a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Columbus; OhioHealth, a 14-hospital system with more than 35,000 associates and more than \$6 billion in annual revenue; and Kokosing Solar, a renewable energy infrastructure leader.

Session Two brought together nonprofit and public sector leaders from the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, which welcomes more than 1.5 million visitors annually and is recognized internationally for its conservation work; Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which has protected more than 50,000 acres across Northeast Ohio; Pelotonia, which has raised more



than \$300 million for cancer research since 2009; and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, which manages 75 state parks, 136 nature preserves, and 21 state forests across the state.

"Ohio's corporations, nonprofits, and public agencies are already demonstrating what successful cross-sector partnerships look like," said Leibson. "Our goal was to capture those lessons and create a framework that communities across the country can adapt to attract investment and advance local priorities."

Together, forum participants identified cross-sector partnerships that have mobilized more than \$20 million across Cleveland, Columbus, and Southeast Ohio, spanning outdoor recreation, conservation, health initiatives, workforce development, and economic revitalization. The brief documents these findings through the Partnership Exchange Model, a framework mapping corporate partner selection criteria, community organization capacity indicators, and operational practices that help maximize mutual value for both sectors.

"Cross-sector partnerships are one of the most powerful tools in economic development, and Ohio is proving that with measurable results," said Jessie Powers, Executive Director of ORCA. "ORCA convened these forums to document how corporations and community organizations are successfully aligning around shared corporate social responsibility goals, so that regions across the nation can replicate Ohio's cross-sector partnership models to catalyze investment and drive sustainable regional growth."

ORCA is currently applying insights from the research to explore nature-based education programming for underserved communities, aligning corporate partnership opportunities with Ohio's environmental and education priorities. The full executive brief is available at <https://www.orcaohio.com/reports>.

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

About ORCA's Economic Recovery Corps Fellowship: ORCA hosts Economic Recovery Corps Fellow Jess Leibson, who supports regional economic development initiatives across Southeast Ohio. Drawing on experience in community economic development, strategic communications, corporate social responsibility, and public service, she works with partners to advance projects that strengthen local economies, support community resilience, and promote sustainable growth. The fellowship reflects ORCA's commitment to building capacity, fostering innovative partnerships, and creating long-term opportunities for communities throughout the region.

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