



Jefferson Regional Foundation

Mon Valley Clean Air Fund Listening Sessions Report

Issued December 2024





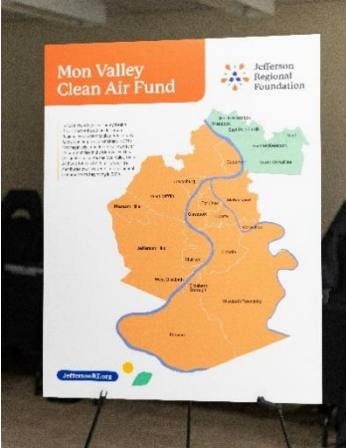
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Background

In 2024 the Allegheny County Health Department enlisted the support of the Jefferson Regional Foundation to distribute settlement funds received from U.S. Steel Corporation resulting from an incident in 2018 that negatively impacted the air quality of 22 communities within the Mon Valley of Allegheny County. Because of the Foundation’s commitment to community engagement and its mission to improve the health and well-being of residents within the service area of Jefferson Hospital, the Foundation agreed to distribute funds on behalf of the county to nonprofit organizations who offer programs focused on public health and/or air quality programs that promote public health and increase the health and well-being of the affected communities.



Map of Impacted Communities in Jefferson Service Area

This designated resource, the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund (MVCAF), totaling \$2.25 million dollars will be distributed over a period of five years beginning in 2025. The impacted communities within the footprint of the Jefferson Foundation include: Clairton, Dravosburg, Duquesne, Elizabeth Borough, Elizabeth Township, Forward, Glassport, Jefferson Hills, Liberty, Lincoln, McKeesport, Pleasant Hills, Port Vue, Versailles, West Elizabeth, and West Mifflin. Additional impacted communities included in the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund are Braddock, East McKeesport, East Pittsburgh, North Braddock, North Versailles, and Wall.

The Jefferson Regional Foundation, in alignment with its mission, vision and operating principles, has prioritized engaging residents from the impacted communities in helping to inform their approach and identify priorities for distributing funds from the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund. To this end, the Foundation hosted three community listening sessions. The goals of each listening session are outlined below:



Alyssa Lyon (left), Kelleigh Boland (middle), Dr. Trisha Gadson (right)

1. Prioritize community and resident voice.
2. From the perspective of residents and stakeholders, understand what a healthy community looks like within the Mon Valley and how MVCAF can support this effort.
3. Identify key organizations and people who are involved in this work.

Overview of Listening Sessions

The Jefferson Regional Foundation (JRF) has a strong commitment to equity and access as one of its core principles is “approaching [its] work through an equity lens and an intentional purpose of inclusivity.” To this end, the Foundation hosted three listening sessions with a specific focus on accessibility to ensure full participation. Some of the best practices implemented in this process are listed below:

- Holding two in-person and one online session.
- Hosting the in-person events in accessible locations in McKeesport and North Braddock.
- Providing ASL and Spanish interpretation services.
- Providing food and children’s activities.
- Engaging a community organizer to personally invite and recruit residents to participate in the sessions.



Children's Activities



Spanish Interpretation Services

Attendance at each listening session is outlined in the table below:

Date/Time	Location	Total Attendees
10/09/24 10 - 11:30am	Noah's Ark Community Center, McKeesport, PA	19
10/16/24 12 - 1pm	Virtual - Zoom	37
10/23/24 6-7:30pm	Woodland Hills School District, Braddock PA	22
TOTAL		78

Listening Session Results

Each of the three listening sessions were facilitated in a similar model with a focus on two core questions for community members:

- 1) What does a healthy community look like to you?
- 2) How might the MVCAF help improve the health of your community?

A Vision for the Future

The following list of topics emerged as top priority areas for investment as residents shared their vision for improving public health and wellbeing:

Youth empowerment:

Residents shared a clear vision for a community where youth have access to a healthy school environment with clean air buildings free of mold and other toxins. Youth should have access to recreational facilities and other safe spaces for afterschool activities.

Support for elderly and most vulnerable populations:

Residents often shared the importance of supporting the most vulnerable populations which included elderly residents along with new immigrants. Some specific priorities shared included providing stipends for seniors impacted by pollution as well as ensuring language accessibility around health and well-being initiatives.

Physical Health of Community

Many residents talked about the importance of their physical health which includes access to healthcare and preventative health supports. They have seen the direct impact of pollution on their health and believe that public health is directly tied to the community's physical health and the ability to address chronic issues that include asthma.

Mental Health of Community

The importance of supporting the mental health of residents was highlighted across all three sessions. The impact of environmental pollution that includes air pollution and noise pollution from industry has a negative impact on the community's mental health.

Access to Food and Transportation

Many residents shared their vision for a community that had access to affordable and healthy food as well as safe and reliable public transportation. In particular, the desire to have a grocery store with fresh fruits and vegetables in Clairton was highlighted numerous times. Safe transportation to schools, medical facilities, grocery stores and entertainment is a central part of the vision for a healthy community.

Access to Nature

Many residents talked about the value and impact of nature on their overall health and well-being. This includes both a vision for more greenspace, trees and community gardens as well as the importance of reducing trash and general blight in the neighborhood.

Economic Opportunity and Housing

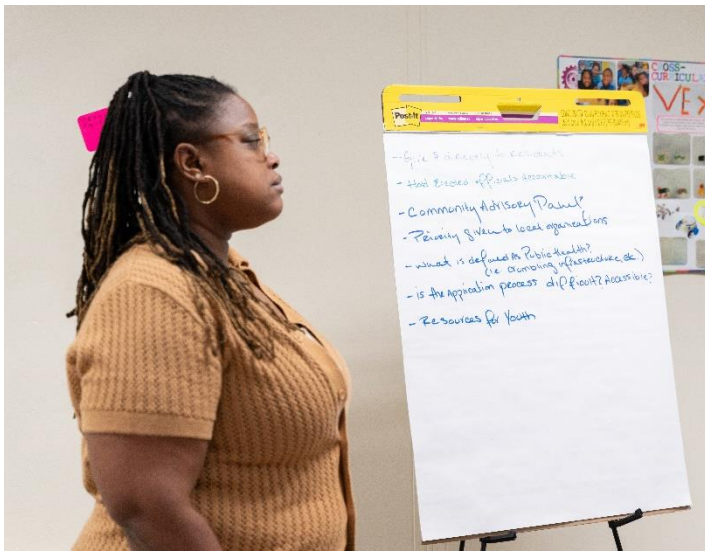
A thriving and healthy community includes vibrant business districts, affordable housing and overall economic opportunity for all residents. Participants shared that the health future of their community is reliant on supporting economic opportunity, entrepreneurship and housing initiatives to support economic mobility and generational wealth building.

Specific Resident Recommended Funding Ideas

Residents identified several programs and initiatives the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund could focus outlined below:

- Youth education and recreation sites
- Stipends for youth, elderly and all families impacted by pollution
- Education and public campaigns around air quality related health issues (ex. asthma)
- Test and remediate toxins in schools
- Youth leadership programs that center youth voice and engagement specifically in environmental and community health issues
- Programs that connect law enforcement, government officials and youth to build trust and a safer environment
- Access to trusted health care facilities and professionals within walking distance that could include satellite offices or resource sharing within existing community centers
- Supporting social determinants of health
- Support for gyms and other recreation facilities
- Provide community health fairs to increase education and awareness

- Provide nutritional health classes and information (recipes, health benefits of food, etc.)
- Direct subsidies or payment of medications for people impacted by pollution
- Air chamber for residents to breathe clean air and feel revitalized
- Therapy spaces and substance abuse recovery centers
- Food coop, farmer's markets and fresh fruit and vegetable distribution
- Transportation to help youth get to football practices
- Transportation to help seniors get to medical appointments
- Planting trees and gardens
- Increase trash cans and trash cleanups
- Soil remediation on unused and vacant lots (to be then used for gardening, play and community space)
- Address blight
- Support entrepreneurship efforts (specifically green jobs)
- Provide air purifiers in homes
- Increase air monitors



Alyssa Lyon recording recommended funding ideas at Braddock listening session



William Toliver, Jr. speaking at Braddock listening session

Next Steps



*Danny Vereb,
Community
Engagement
Manager*

The Jefferson Regional Foundation commits to consider the themes that emerged during the three listening sessions when evaluating the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund grant proposals.



*Stephen Ankney, Grants,
Evaluation and Data Manager*



*Dr. Trisha Gadson, Chief Executive
Officer*

Non-Profit organizations who are interested in applying for funding via the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund can schedule meetings at appropriate times with Foundation staff by contacting Kelleigh Boland, Director of Grantmaking and Strategy at Kelleigh.boland@jeffersonrf.org , 412-990-7117.

Further information on the timing and eligibility for the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund can be found on the Foundation website at <https://jeffersonrf.org/grantmaking/mon-valley-clean-air-fund/>.

Foundation staff will begin to invite organizations to submit proposals for the Fund in December 2024/January 2025.



*Kelleigh Boland, Director of
Grantmaking and Strategy*

Acknowledgements

The Jefferson Regional Foundation (JRF) is grateful for the partnership of Procopia Nonprofit Consulting for providing planning and logistical support in the implementation and final reporting of the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund (MVCAF) listening sessions. The assistance of Jason Berry, Ph.D., Alyssa Lyon, Jake Seltman and William Toliver, Jr. played a critical role in the success of actively engaging community members.

In addition, JRF acknowledges the residents and community stakeholders who attended one or all the sessions. Their willingness to share critical information via their personal stories is an intangible asset that is both honored and respected.

Thank you all for your assistance and support.

The JRF Team

Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a list of questions that were asked at least once during the three listening sessions:

Q. If you were a standing declarant in a case against US Steel, would you be eligible to apply to the MVCAF?

A. If as a resident of the Mon Valley, you provided a statement of fact about your experience within the community but did not initiate litigation against US Steel nor have you served as an expert witness in a case against US Steel, you are eligible to apply for funding via a viable nonprofit organization.

Q. If someone gave a deposition in a case involving US Steel, would that disqualify them?

A. Giving a deposition in a case involving US Steel does not automatically disqualify an applicant. However, if an applicant has initiated litigation against US Steel and/or served as an expert witness against US Steel, they cannot apply for this funding. The Jefferson Regional Foundation reserves the right to further assess any applicants that provided a deposition to assure eligibility.

Q. Will certain communities who were closest to the fire event get more money than other communities? Is the annual distribution of funds equal across neighborhoods?

A. No, there are no set restrictions about how the funds should be distributed across neighborhoods within the MVCAF area.

Q. Does the potential sale of US Steel have an impact on this fund?

A. No, the way that the consent decree was made, if US Steel is sold then the new owners will assume the responsibility of this settlement.

Q. Is this funding over and above the normal funding that JRF provides?

A. Yes, these are separate funds that will be distributed by JRF with its own unique criteria for distributions. JRF will continue to provide grant funds above and beyond the MVCAF.

Q. Can organizations apply for and receive funds more than once over the five-year period?

A. Yes, there are no restrictions on how many times an organization can apply or receive funding from the MVCAF.

Q. If the Jefferson Regional Foundation is distributing \$2.25 million and the settlement was for a total of \$5 million, where is the rest of the money going?

A. The rest of the settlement funds are being distributed through Allegheny County Economic Development.

Q. If someone is not a non-profit but doing this work, can they still apply for funds?

A. Yes, they can apply by identifying a fiscal sponsor who is aligned in their mission and who would apply on their behalf. The Foundation does have requirements for fiscal sponsors.

Q. If \$450,000 is distributed each year, how much administrative fees are taken from that?

A. The Foundation's Mon Valley Clean Air Fund was structured to have a 5.5% administrative fee of \$23k which will be utilized for administrative costs.

Q. What is the amount that each organization can apply for and how many total grants will be distributed each year?

A. There is no set restriction on requested grant amounts or the number of grants distributed each year.

Q. Is there going to be priority given to organizations based within the focus communities?

A. Yes. Through the listening sessions it was clear that organizations located in the target communities and already doing the work should be prioritized.

Q. Can Churches apply?

A. Yes, non-profit churches can apply for programming addressing public health in the broad community.

Q. Will there be a community advisory panel used to select grantees?

A. No, the Mon Valley Clean Air Fund will follow the Foundation's existing process for reviewing and selecting grantees.

Q. What if people don't know how to measure their outcomes? Will you offer support to those people and organizations?

A. Yes, JRF staff is available to discuss potential ways to express and track outcomes.