



WV CAREER COLLABORATIVE NEWSLETTER

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The WV Career Collaborative and First2 Network hosted the Spring 2026 Co-Conference from May 11–13, bringing together educators, students, industry leaders, workforce professionals, and community organizations from across Appalachia to explore innovative approaches to STEM education and workforce development. Centered on the theme, “Building Connections to Make Appalachia a Great Place to Learn, Work, and Call Home,” the conference welcomed 124 attendees over three days. Participants engaged in sessions focused on strengthening partnerships between education and industry, expanding work-based learning opportunities, supporting student success, and preparing the future workforce for emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.



Dr. Robert Niichel presents at the WV Career Collaborative and First2 Network Spring 2026 Co-Conference

WV Career Collaborative and First2 Network Spring 2026 Co-Conference Recap

Throughout the three-day event, attendees participated in plenary panels, concurrent sessions, networking events, and interactive activities designed to foster collaboration and idea sharing. For many attendees, the conference also provided an opportunity to share personal experiences and perspectives on living and working in Appalachia. Alena Gray, WVCC Power Up Intern and Glenville State University Student, reflected on growing up in West Virginia and learning the value of hard work from an early age. After transitioning from a position in a local print shop to working on grant initiatives, Alena noted how inspiring it was to see so many individuals and organizations united by a common goal: creating positive change and expanding opportunities for students and job seekers across the state.

The conference highlighted the shared mission of the WV Career Collaborative and First2 Network to strengthen STEM pathways and workforce connections across Appalachia. Through discussions and presentations, participants emphasized the value of collaboration, student-centered solutions, and regional partnerships in addressing workforce challenges and creating opportunities for students and job seekers to live, work, and succeed in the region.



The Path to Entrepreneurship in STEM

Join us for an engaging seminar focused on entrepreneurship, innovation, and career pathways in West Virginia

- Date: July 16, 2026
- Location: White Hall Event and Conference Center
- Connect with entrepreneurs & business leaders
- Engage with students & educators
- Explore partnerships & community impact
- Learn about innovation in Appalachia



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER:



Networking Events

Regional networking events held across Upshur, Preston, Lewis, Calhoun-Gilmer, and the Little Kanawha Area brought together educators, employers, workforce professionals, and community partners to discuss workforce and education needs in rural West Virginia. Across all counties, participants emphasized the importance of stronger connections between education and industry, early career exposure, work-based learning opportunities, and the development of soft skills such as communication and professionalism.

While many challenges were shared, each county identified unique priorities, including housing shortages, transportation barriers, workforce retention, limited career awareness, and the need for more flexible education pathways.

The events reinforced that workforce development is most effective when regional collaboration is paired with locally driven solutions. Participants agreed that ongoing partnerships among education, industry, workforce organizations, and community leaders are essential to strengthening the region's workforce.

To see the full notes from all networking events and any upcoming events, visit our website: www.wvcarecollab.org



Calhoun-Gilmer County Networking Event



Upshur County Networking Event



Preston County Networking Event

Explore the New WVCC Website

The new and improved WV Career Collaborative website, featuring the WVCC Internship Bridge, a database of available internships throughout the state, is now available. The website highlights initiatives such as internships, job shadowing, industry advisory boards, professional development opportunities, and virtual reality career exploration experiences designed to introduce students to STEM careers and emerging industries in West Virginia. Companies and organizations can submit internship opportunities as well.

The site also serves as a resource hub where visitors can learn about upcoming events, regional partnerships, student opportunities, and ways to get involved in building a stronger workforce pipeline across the state.

Visit us at:

www.wvcareercollab.org



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: From Handshakes to Headsets

How Payton Packer Landed a Career at Extreme Endeavors

By Logan Harrison, Career Counselor at Glenville State University

As an internship supervisor, watching a student master the networking playbook is the ultimate reward. That is exactly what Power Up intern Payton Packer did, turning a casual campus introduction into a full-time career milestone at Extreme Endeavors in Philippi, WV.

The journey began at Glenville State University during a Sci/Math department career panel featuring Mike Masterman of Extreme Endeavors. When the floor opened for one-on-one chats, Payton didn't hesitate—he stepped right up to introduce himself. Less than a week later, the WVCC conducted a site visit of the Philippi facility.

A few weeks later, we finalized a WVCC-sponsored internship for Payton at the facility. He quickly exceeded expectations, and less than halfway through the program, he came back with exciting news: he and Extreme Endeavors were already discussing a full-time position after the internship. Even more impressive, he had begun taking on site management responsibilities.



"I am just so thankful for the opportunity," Payton later reflected. "Without WVCC, I wouldn't even have known about Extreme Endeavors." Payton's reflection highlights the importance of showcasing the innovative industries hidden throughout West Virginia.

"It all moved incredibly fast," Payton said. "One minute I'm learning the ropes as an intern, and the next, I'm being handed site management opportunities and a contract."

Please join us in congratulating Payton! His rapid transition from student to site leader is a testament to the talent thriving right here in the Mountain State.

Congratulations to our WVCC Power Up Intern Graduates!

Please join us in congratulating our WVCC Power Up Interns who graduated during the 2025–2026 academic year: **Payton Packer, Sara Lowe, Elizabeth Adkins, Izzy Simmons, and Jesse Landis.**

We are incredibly proud of all they have accomplished and grateful for the contributions they made during their internships. We wish them continued success as they begin the next chapter of their journeys and look forward to seeing all the great things they will achieve!