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# Generation WV launches program to attract, retain young talent



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By Carrie Hodousek in News | January 31, 2017 at 1:32PM

**HUNTINGTON, W.Va.** — A statewide organization, working to attract and retain young professionals to the Mountain State, has unveiled a new fellowship program.

Impact WV was introduced Tuesday in Huntington by the group Generation West Virginia.

The program offers a year-long, paid fellowship at some of the state’s most innovative companies. Weekly volunteer opportunities are also available at non profit organizations.

“We hope that through this program fellows will gain a more nuance perspective of the opportunities and challenges that are facing our state while giving them a seat at the table to be a part of coming up with creative solutions to those challenges,” said Natalie Roper, executive director of Generation WV.

Roper said, too often, young people leave the state because they are unable to find job opportunities.

“We know that young people can’t stay in a place without a job. This fellowship program is an important program to be able to connect young people to jobs to give them an opportunity to stay,” she said.

So, why stay? Roper said living and working in small communities offer great networking opportunities.

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“Young people can get engaged and make real impact in a place. In larger cities, it’s hard to get connected to networks quickly and I think that’s so powerful about being here in West Virginia,” she said.

A recent Payscale.com study shows 72 percent of West Virginia University graduates who had been out of school for at least five years had left the state.

“That is a scary number,” Roper said. “We’re losing too many of our college graduates and young people to opportunities outside the state.”

West Virginia also has one of the oldest populations in the nation. Roper said, according to census projections, 1 in 4 West Virginians will be over the age of 65 by 2030.

Downstream Strategies, an environmental consulting firm based out of Morgantown, is one of six participating companies with Impact WV. Evan Hansen, the company’s president, said half of their employees are West Virginia natives.

“We think it’s really important to provide opportunities to people who grew up here, people who went to school here or people who just love the state,” Hansen said. “We absolutely must diversify the economy and we absolutely must come up with ways to attract people and keep people here. Part of that has to be high quality jobs.”

The firm is looking to hire a fellow for the program. Hansen said the fellow, depending on his or her skills, will go out to collect water samples, possibly work in a policy analysis role or work on projects to create jobs on formerly mined lands in southern West Virginia.

Phase One of the application process began Tuesday. Generation WV is accepting resumes and cover letters through Mar. 13. Applicants will be contacted within 10 days after that.

Phase Two includes an essay question and a video about why the potential fellow wants to live and work in West Virginia. Phase Three interviews will be conducted in May. The first Impact WV class will be announced in June.

To learn more about the application process, visit [www.weimpactwv.org](http://www.weimpactwv.org).

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