



Sara Cottingham

Senior Community Planner

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Profile

Ms. Cottingham is a planner who focuses on community and economic development in rural communities. Though well-versed in environmental analysis, she specializes in the preparation of economic development plans, recreation plans, organizational assessments, and feasibility studies for a variety of sectors. Her plans and studies have guided strategic investment and project implementation for a number of rural community revitalization efforts in Appalachia and beyond. She has also worked extensively with nonprofits, ranging from small grassroots groups to regional and national organizations, and offers expertise in grant writing, capacity building, fundraising, and volunteer management.

Skills and Experience

Has led planning processes for community- and county-level revitalization plans, trail plans, urban renewal plans, and watershed-based plans and partnered in creating county comprehensive plans, blight action plans, and riverfront enhancement plans.

Secured more than \$8.2 million for community- and regional-scale projects throughout the mid-Atlantic region from 2021–2023.

Created a model for assessing tourism readiness and strength-based opportunities, which has been implemented in communities and counties across West Virginia and the mid-Atlantic.

Serves as the lead technical expert for the Mountaineer Trail Network Recreation Authority, West Virginia's first regional trail authority for non-motorized recreation, and served as the lead author and planner for the Preston County Master Trail Plan, the state's first county-wide trail plan.

Serves as the Grants Coordinator for the Mon Forest Towns Partnership.

Authored market analyses, economic impact studies, grant proposals, and development plans that have led to direct business creation and downtown revitalization in Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia.

Authored organizational and program assessments for a range of clients across several sectors.

Experienced in leading working teams, including municipal, state, and federal agencies; health departments; universities; nonprofits; and local stakeholders.

Skilled in fundraising, grant writing, prospect research, and report preparation for private foundations, government agencies, and corporate giving programs.

Provides assistance, training, and nonprofit management coaching to community-based nonprofit organizations nationwide through personalized technical assistance, workshops, and conference sessions.

Experienced with state and regional survey data collection and analysis.

Education

Certificate, Financial Success for Nonprofits, Cornell University, 2021.

M.S., Community & Regional Planning, the University of Texas at Austin, 2010. Focus in Environmental and Watershed Planning.

B.A., Geography, the University of Texas at Austin, 2008.

Representative Publications

Cottingham S et al. 2021. Bracing for Change: A Market Study of Community Needs, the Built Environment, and Projected Growth in Thomas, West Virginia. Prepared for the City of Thomas.

Cottingham S, Osborne K. 2021. River Cities Redevelopment Roadmap. Prepared for the Fayette County Commission.

Cottingham S et al. 2020. Mountaineer Trail Network: Preston County Master Trail Plan. Prepared for Friends of the Cheat.