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Virginia Tech’s Monuments Across Appalachian Virginia awards more than \$300,000 in first round of projects

Four projects highlighting the region’s diversity receive funding from Monuments Across Appalachian Virginia (MAAV). MAAV is a three-year initiative dedicated to funding the construction of 6–10 new monuments in Appalachian Virginia, with the goal of sharing the untold stories of the historically marginalized, oppressed, and excluded communities in the region. Each community-designed project chosen for funding touches on important Appalachian issues and communities, including the Indigenous Yesáh peoples and Monacan/Tutelo Saponi language; the contributions and cultures of Latine Appalachian peoples; the visibility of African American communities and histories in the region; and the natural beauty and irreplaceability of Appalachian forests and the underrepresented communities that have communed with and safeguarded them. Each of these projects were chosen by the MAAV advisory board because of their dedication to highlighting the significance of these communities to Appalachian history.

“As an advisory board member, I’m delighted that MAAV and the Mellon Foundation are supporting these innovative projects,” said Paul Quigley, an associate professor of Civil War studies at Virginia Tech. “Each one reimagines what counts as a monument, who gets to create them, and what work monuments can do for the cultural health of our region. Telling overlooked stories in creative ways, from visual art to music to physical markers, these inspiring projects highlight the vitality of the many communities that make up Appalachian Virginia.”

The Yesá:sahj Language and Sacred Places (YLSP) Project is a collaboration between the [Yesá:sahj Language Project](#), [Indigenous East](#), [7 Directions of Service](#) and the Virginia Tech Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. Led by Desiree Shelley, Board Representative of the Yesa:sahj Language Project and Virginia Tech graduate student; Alexa Sutton Lawrence, Ph.D, Executive Director of Landberry and the lead founder of Indigenous East; and Donna Westfall-Rudd, Ph.D, Virginia Tech professor, the project is creating a series of public monuments in support of ongoing collaborative, intertribal, Indigenous



community-led efforts to revitalize the Monacan/Tutelo/Saponi language (Yesá:sahj) and the connections of contemporary Indigenous communities to ancestral homelands in Appalachian Virginia. Through online education and public storytelling, the Yesá:sahj Language and Sacred Places (YLSP) Project seeks to encourage visitors and learners to reframe their understanding of American history, recognizing the on-going presence of Indigenous people in this area (the Ama:i Yesá). Through Yesá stories, art, and traditional ecological knowledge, the YLSP will highlight the deep relationship that Yesá peoples (the Monacan; Occaneechi; Haliwa-Saponi; Sappony; Ohio Saponi; Tutelo; and other Eastern Siouan tribes) hold to their sacred places and traditional territories across Appalachia.

Montañas Reimagined, a project in collaboration with Estela Knott from the [Lua Project](#), the [Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 621](#) in Luray, Virginia, and Dr. Amy Azano, Director of the [Virginia Tech Center for Rural Education](#), reimagines Appalachia as a shared and co-created space with, by, and alongside Latine communities. This monument project commemorates and reimagines our “little mountains” by celebrating Latine Appalachian art, food, music, and culture at the Blue Ridge Montaña Festival; by creating interdisciplinary place-based community educational materials; and by producing a digital album so that a more nuanced and complex story of the region can be shared locally, regionally, and beyond.

The Travelers Inn: Black Appalachian History in Bluefield, is a project that aims to renew the African American neighborhoods of Bluefield’s North Side and East End in collaboration with Greg Galford, Assistant Professor in the Virginia Tech Department of Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management, and Vonnia Harris Davis, artist and community advocate. The East End and North Side neighborhoods hold profound significance to Black Appalachian history, and this project seeks to make their contributions visible through public memory projects. The project invites community members to solidify their cultural legacy for future possibilities, including by reimagining historical sites such as Travelers Inn, listed in the “Negro Travelers Green Book” during the segregated Jim Crow Era. The team will engage in community conversations to inform a public art installation that reflects the unique character, culture, and spirit of Black residents' history.

Finally, the Forest Botanicals Region Living Monument seeks to challenge existing narratives about what is valued in Central Appalachia through highlighting the cultural, historical, ecological, and economic significance of Southwest Virginia’s abundant understory of native medicinal herbs and foods. Professors Shannon Bell and John Munsell from Virginia Tech will collaborate with [Appalachian Sustainable Development](#), forest botanicals practitioners, and members of the community to design a woodland trail storywalk at Flag Rock Recreation Area in Norton, Virginia. This trail will connect to an online exhibit featuring interviews with a



diverse group of Appalachians who are involved in wild harvesting, forest farming, and wild-crafting woodland botanicals. This monument will celebrate Central Appalachia's forest treasure to inspire a more ecologically sustainable vision for the region's future.

Funding opportunities for community group projects are still available. Applications are due January 10. Please visit www.moremountainstories.org for more information.

About MAAV

[Monuments Across Appalachian Virginia](#) is based in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech and is part of a \$250 million initiative funded by the [Mellon Foundation](#). The Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project began in 2020 to support public projects that reimagine commemorative spaces and transform the way history is told in the United States. MAAV is led by Dr. Emily Satterwhite of Virginia Tech's Appalachian Studies Program and Dr. Katrina Powell of Virginia Tech's Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies.

MAAV is proud to enable, support, and reward meaningful and extensive university-community collaborations. Through these collaborations, MAAV works to ensure greater participation in decision-making and governance by community partners. They are committed to collective, reflexive, and reciprocal working relationships through which new projects develop in coordination with organizations, constituents, stakeholders, and designers.