

Resilience Has an Address in Western NC: New Solar Microgrids Strengthen Communities After Helene

Appalachian partners are creating Resilience Hubs—community anchors to aid Hurricane Helene recovery and prepare communities for future storms.

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Funding a Resilience Hub in rural Yancey County means this community will have the reliable power and resources needed to keep people safe in the next crisis, and to thrive long after recovery.”

Andrew Crosson, CEO of Invest Appalachia.

organizations [Footprint Project](#), [Invest Appalachia](#), and [Appalachian Voices](#) (fiscal sponsor of the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund) are backing Resilience Hubs to support Helene recovery and long-term community strength by providing permanent and autonomous solar power installations that keep people safe and connected.

Central Appalachia has weathered generations of disinvestment, and increasingly frequent climate-driven disasters expose serious infrastructure gaps. But across the region, communities are creating solutions that strengthen daily life and long-term preparedness in small towns, rural areas, and underserved neighborhoods.

Some microgrids are mobile, while Resilience Hub installations are permanent improvements to trusted local spaces—community centers, churches, fire departments, schools, and businesses that serve as gathering places. The Resilience Hubs we support are equipped with solar power and battery storage to sustain and provide back-up power for critical functions, including communication, medical device operation, medicine storage, and food preparation. Year-round, they also cut utility costs when the grid is up and expand access to essential services.

“It’s been beautiful what our team and many partners have accomplished since the storm. These solar microgrids not only make us more prepared for the next grid interruption, they strengthen the electric grid and make us less dependent on fossil fuel supply lines,” said James Trowbridge, Senior Program Manager - Appalachia of Footprint Project.

Five New Resilience Hub Projects

Celo Community Center Permanent Microgrid (Yancey County, NC)

After a month without power post-Helene, the Celo Community Center became a hub for supplies, communication, and childcare. A new microgrid allows the center to continue serving its role during emergencies while reducing energy costs year-round. Gred Gross, building manager, expects the installation to offset most of the center's power use: "That'll save us quite a bit of money over the course of the year. And, of course, if we have another outage, we'll be ready."

Double Island Volunteer Fire Department (Yancey County, NC)

Without power for six weeks after Helene, Double Island coordinated rescues, supply distribution, and volunteer housing. With new solar microgrid equipment, the department is prepared to maintain essential operations and protect its community.

"Double Island kept serving their neighbors even when supplies were scarce, rescues were dangerous, and roads were closed. Funding a Resilience Hub here means they will have the reliable power and resources needed to keep people safe in the next crisis, and to thrive long after recovery," said Andrew Crosson, CEO of Invest Appalachia.

Alan Campos Mobile Home Park (Buncombe County, NC)

When Helene destroyed homes in this largely Spanish-speaking community, CORE and partner organizations stepped in to rebuild more than 25 homes. A solar trailer designed to power tools and operations has kept recovery efforts moving.

ROAR Microgrid Community Trailer (Madison County, NC)

Mutual aid group Rural Organizing and Resilience stepped up to serve the hard-hit Marshall area in the aftermath of Helene, providing food, water, and essential supplies when resources were scarce.

With a solar-powered microgrid trailer featuring 3 kilowatts of generation and 18 kilowatt-hours of storage, ROAR's trailer supports emergency response and everyday community needs. "Our mobile solar trailer allows us to provide power for emergency communications, medical equipment, water wells, and more when the grid goes down, allowing us to provide crucial support to communities in the immediate wake of catastrophes," said Matt Wallace of ROAR.



Catherine Hebson of the Footprint Project inspects the ROAR Microgrid Trailer

Broad River Fire Department - Shumont Substation (Buncombe County, NC)

Cut off for weeks after Helene by flooding, landslides, and destroyed roads, this fire department became a lifeline for residents left without power. A new permanent solar microgrid now ensures first responders can keep medicine safe, power critical equipment, and maintain communications during future crises.

These projects, driven by a small group of determined partners, have accelerated Appalachia's long-term resilience and preparedness. The Footprint Project's Resilience Hubs are poised for a significant scale-up, as the state of North Carolina recently announced a \$5 million investment in solar and battery storage microgrids for emergency responders and community-based organizations.

"The people who are still displaced and struggling to regain their livelihoods since Helene were living day-to-day before the storm. For future resilience, it's vital that projects--to improve readiness—are built by and with the communities on the frontlines of climate disasters," said Kristin Stroup of Appalachian Voices.

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