

March 21, 2024

Metroplan
Attn: Casey Covington, Executive Director
501 W. Markham St., Ste. B
Little Rock, AR 72201

RE: Letter of Commitment for Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition's CPRG application

Dear Mr. Covington:

I am writing as the Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith (UAFS) to express our dedicated support for the City of Fort Smith and Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition's application for the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG). UAFS is positioned as a strong supporter of their EPA CPRG application. We applaud their vision and efforts in implementing greenhouse gas reduction projects across Arkansas' three largest metro areas and appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with our partners. As the founder of the River Valley Green Energy and Education Program (RV-GEEP), housed at UAFS, its partners and I are pleased to collaborate with the Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition in their endeavor to accomplish their EV Charging Infrastructure Solar for Nelson Hall Homes Public Housing, Alleyway Rehabilitation, and Workforce Development goals.

For the planet's sustainability, the weatherization of homes and access to energy-efficient infrastructure regardless of demographic, social class, religious, and other social differences in the River Valley are critical elements of the RV-GEEP. Low-income communities, including grassroots organizations, are at the core of RV-GEEP's mission. We prioritize building stakeholder relationships to establish green energy efficiency, infrastructure, and education among grassroots and NGOs. As we advance, the City of Fort Smith, the private sector, UAFS, the Citizen's Climate League-Fort Smith chapter, and others foster intentional relationships and an inclusive and supportive milieu. We enhance partnerships by expanding the scope of partners within communities to support weatherization and green energy infrastructure. We identify beneficiaries in River Valley communities for Green Energy projects, prioritizing low-income minority communities initially. We cultivate project partners in communities outside of the River Valley, helping to develop practical applications of Green Energy projects and broader access to relevant resources and methods for application.

UAFS has committed to sustainability and resource stewardship at the institutional level as part of its new strategic plan. This strategic pillar will ensure the university practices promote environmental, social, and economic sustainability by adopting responsible practices and policies across campus. This commitment includes optimizing resource utilization, investing in energy-efficient technologies, and fostering a culture of sustainability among students, faculty, and staff. UAFS evaluates the efficiency of university operations, seeking to measure the return on investment of new and ongoing initiatives and opportunities to optimize cost through shared services, new technologies, and resource stewardship. As part of this initiative, the university invests in various systems to be more energy efficient.

We envision partnering with the Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition to diversify energy sources in the River Valley, facilitating systemic change and increasing River Valley-wide awareness about energy efficiency. We believe engaging a broad spectrum of community leadership and partnerships is the way forward. Thus, we are delighted to support the vision of the City of Fort Smith and the Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition. Supporting the CPRG grant solicitation and technical and personnel details in implementing environmental conservation measures aligns with UAFS's strategic goal of institutional sustainability and resource stewardship. Specifically, to ensure the university's vital work will continue, UAFS will promote environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

We pledge our support of the Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition in their grant solicitation, a strong contender for receiving the CPRG award as we work towards a sustainable energy future. We anticipate workforce and infrastructure development, increased green energy discourses, policy briefs, and networking between experts, thought leaders, advocates, and policymakers. We envision increased research and investments in green energy and education among low-income families and diverse stakeholders in the River Valley. We applaud the Coalition's focus on Arkansas' three largest metro areas and their foresight in targeting the environmental and economic benefits of Arkansas' low-income and underserved communities.

We enthusiastically submit this letter to support and commit to the goals outlined in the Arkansas Tri-Region Coalition's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant application.

Sincerely,

Paulette Meikle

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UAFS empowers the social mobility of its students and the economic growth of the River Valley through exceptional educational opportunities and robust community partnerships.

