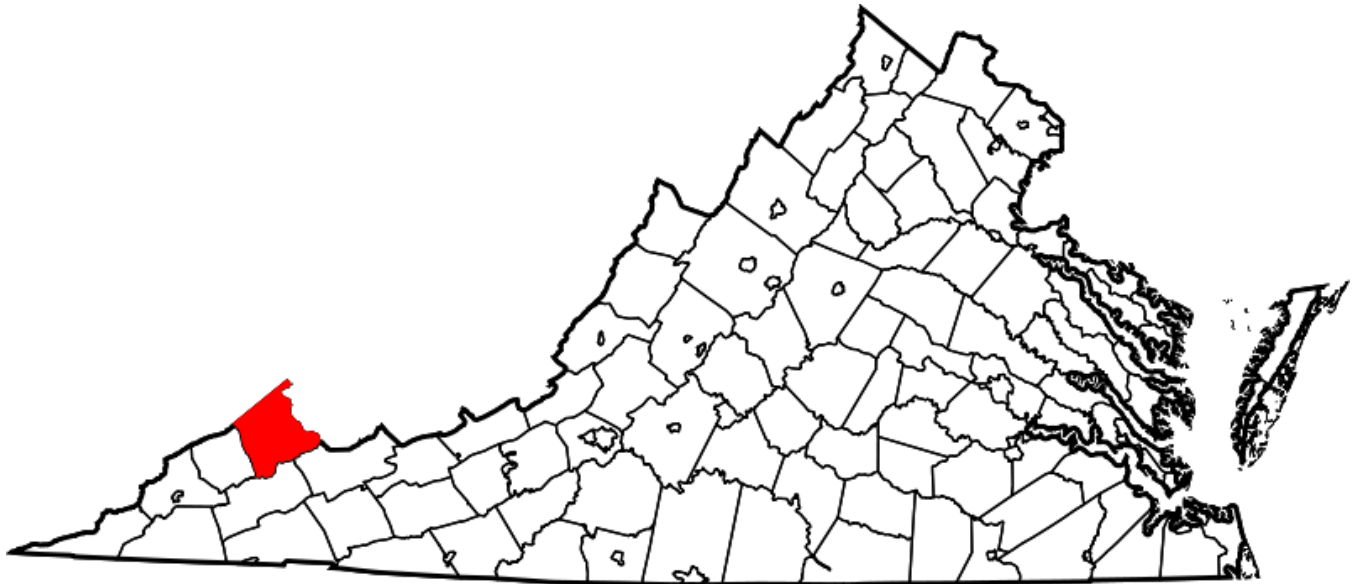




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# **Buchanan County 2023 Situation Analysis Report**

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# Priority Issues

## Issue 1: Employment

Diversity with employment and the limited opportunities were identified as the top issue facing Buchanan County. This issue should address increasing and diversifying jobs, having competitive wages and benefits available, developing entrepreneurial skills, and fostering a flexible and qualified able workforce. The loss of mining jobs in the Buchanan County area have resulted in significant loss of income to many families in the area resulting in an increase of the unemployed and in some cases relocation. A portion of this issue is being addressed with current VCE resources. This priority issue is beyond the VCE resource means and control for full impact.

## Issue 2: Health and Wellness

Buchanan County shows a higher than state average for heart disease, diabetes and cancer. The increase of childhood obesity is also a concern in the community as well as the growing drug abuse issues. VCE is currently addressing a portion of these issues. Low-resource families are provided nutrition education through Family Nutrition Programming and 4-H Youth Development which helps to reduce the health risks related to obesity. 4-H also addresses programs for at risk youth through Character Education. However, the increase in drug related abuse is outside the scope of VCE.

## Issue 3: Quality and affordable child care/elder care

Quality and affordable child care/elder care and special needs care were also identified as a pressing issue in Buchanan County. VCE will seek opportunities to provide programming upon completion of an Adult Living Facility and Childcare Facility.

## Issue 4: Leadership

Focus group members felt a huge issue in Buchanan County is a future need for highly competent and focused leaders. VCE does address this issue through the 4-H Youth Development Program. 4-H teaches youth a variety of life skills such as: planning/organizing, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making as well as how to organize a meeting and discuss issues in a positive manner.

# Introduction

Buchanan County conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the calendar year of 2023. The situational analysis was led by the Extension Leadership Council (ELC) and involved the development of a Buchanan County Unit Profile and gathering residents' perspectives on issues and problems in the county. Data and information were analyzed by the ELC and priority issues were identified.

The ELC met after reviewing the SA 2018 to identify available resources. ELC members and VCE staff gathered data from the VCE Situation Analysis website, the Southwest Virginia Community College Institutional Research Department, The Centers for Disease control, the U.S. Census Bureau, Buchanan County Office of Marketing and Tourism, The Virginia Department of Health, the Census of Agriculture, the Virginia Forest Survey, The Virginia Mountaineer, and the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce. The Buchanan County Comprehensive Plan was also reviewed. As a group, the ELC and VCE staff analyzed and summarized the data. The group recognized that Buchanan County is in a unique position of development with many opportunities for creative planning. Basically, the physical face of Buchanan County is under construction as well as the resident make-up.

- Coalfields Expressway (phases under construction)
- Development of Southern Gap (unique opportunities available for the expansion in the areas of residential, commercial and industrial)
- Elk Restoration (on going)
- Transportation and Logistics Center (completed, but expanding educational opportunities and addition of nursing program)
- Construction of County and School Bus Garage (completed)
- PSA Facility at Southern Gap (under construction)
- Corridor Q Completed (eight miles to Elkhorn from Southern Gap)
- Development of Regional Airport with Hangar Availability (under construction, reclamation now in progress) plus 80 acres of industrial sites
- Development of Amphitheatre at Southern Gap
- Development of Travel Center for Southern Gap
- Development of Buchanan County High School at Southern Gap (projected completion four years)
- Adult Living Facility (ground has been broken at Southern Gap)
- People Inc. and United Way are collaborating on an affordable child care facility
- Upgrade of Cellular and Internet Service
- Breaks Park expansion and infrastructure upgrade

The population of the county is becoming more diverse as different opportunities develop for education and employment. These rapid, recent changes led the ELC and VCE staff to realize that not only should we study past trends and data, but also, we needed to attempt to project how these changes will affect the county in the near future. The ELC determined the best way to update the Unit Situation Analysis and to gather a variety of perspectives was to conduct focus groups with local leaders and residents in the community. After analyzing and discussing the data combined with the resident perspectives, the ELC and VCE staff identified top priority issues for Buchanan County, including those that could be addressed with current VCE resources and those that were outside the scope of current VCE resources.

## Unit Profile

Buchanan County is located in the southwest region of Virginia and is bordered by Kentucky and West Virginia. With a land area of 504 square miles, it is a rural community with 86.3% of the land use as timberland that is entirely privately owned with no major cities and one interstate park. The population of 20,355 is mainly white (94.8%) and English speaking (97.4%). According to local education data sources 69.8% of the population are high school graduates with only 11.3% earning a Bachelor's degree or higher. Most residents (81.6%) own their

own homes (median value of \$71,800) and the median household income is \$37,093. Some 25.2% of the total population is below poverty. From 2018-2023, the median household income has increased \$7,414. High School dropouts shows a slight increase from 5% (2017) to 5.3% (2023) of total enrollment while the county population has decreased from 22,000 to 20,355. Recent flooding in two areas of the county has caused displacement for some residents and the purchase of property by the Army Corp. of Engineers and the addition of roads has also contributed to families relocating from the county. The rate of heart disease, cancer and diabetes occurrences are all above the rate for the state of Virginia.

The physical development of the county is proceeding, and this will, in turn, impact the population dynamics for the next decade. The Corridor Q (eight miles to Elkhorn, KY from Southern Gap) is completed. The Coalfields Expressway construction is continuing. Southwest Virginia Community college is utilizing their local training center for educational classes and for the proctoring of classes as well as offering dual enrollment at 10% of tuition cost to high school students. Southwest Virginia Community College in partnership with Buchanan County also offers residents who meet appropriate criteria classes with no tuition required and unique opportunities are available with the expansion of residential, commercial, and industrial projects located within the county.

The key issues identified in the review of the previous documentation are as follows:

- Decreasing population negatively impacts the tax base and work force
- Median incomes levels are slightly increasing
- Poverty rates are showing signs of a very slight decrease
- High degree of heart disease, cancer and diabetes
- Shortage of affordable quality housing and rental property

## Community and Residential Perspectives

Based on areas identified in the unit profile, five focus groups were conducted with local residents and business leaders.

The focus group of twelve local business leaders identified these key issues:

- **Employment:** There is a shortage of good paying jobs and a diverse, flexible, and qualified work force. Employment opportunities need to diversify and increase to retain and attract residents. With a decrease in the availability of local jobs in the mining industry, emphasis needs to be placed on increasing employment opportunities through economic development efforts in retail business, higher skilled jobs, tourism, and recreation. Entrepreneurship development opportunities will allow citizens to acquire knowledge and skills to create small business opportunities. The shortage of jobs and displacement as a result of flooding has resulted in a **declining population which decreases tax revenue.**
- **Community development:** In order to meet the needs of the life-long and incoming population, infrastructure must develop, quality and affordable housing needs to increase, more restaurants are needed, more shopping facilities are needed, and recreation opportunities need to expand. Continued highway development will provide opportunities for both community development and economic development.
- **Quality and affordable child care** as well as care for elderly and citizens with special needs are limited.
- Healthy living and nutrition education should be available beginning at an early age to help citizens learn to make healthy choices, reduce the risk of chronic diseases and ensure a healthy community.
- **Substance/Drug abuse** programs: available to residents with issues.
- Emphasis should be placed on acquiring education and life skill competencies to ensure more productive citizens.
- Emphasis on **developing leaders** for the future. We need better leadership in our community.
- Upgrade of **transportation** in the region.

The summary of eight member of the Grundy Women's Club identified these key issues:

- Need for education
- Need for substance abuse prevention
- Need for life management skills
- Need for economic development

The summary of ten board members for the Big Sandy Soil and Conservation District identified these key issues:

- Need for more recreation
- Need for increased economic development to ensure more jobs with better pay
- Need for leadership skills
- Need for more affordable housing
- Need for cultural enrichment
- Need for day care centers
- Need for conservation of natural resources
- Need for affordable housing

The summary of seven members of a 4-H teen leadership club identified these key issues

- Unavailability of healthy, affordable food
- Need for better education for youth
- Unemployment
- Homelessness and poverty
- Diabetes education
- Drug abuse
- Increase in 4-H activities for teens

ELC members and VCE staff conducted 30 face-to-face surveys of the general population. The key issues identified were:

- Need for housing for all income levels
- Need for diverse, higher paying jobs and better employment
- Need for leadership and vision
- Emergency preparedness training for our community
- Need our own water source for the county for drinking water, energy and recreation
- Beautification projects and cleanup of the county
- Drug addiction and abuse issues; need for rehabilitation facilities, education, and prevention
- Need for better schools
- Need for career and technical education
- Need of maintenance of all county infrastructure
- Daycare and elderly care
- Healthcare access, closer to home
- Health and wellness awareness
- Increase development for tourism
- Need for entertainment and shopping
- Need for political credibility and election access
- Need for social, culture and entertainment opportunities

# Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Buchanan County.

- Employment
- Health and Wellness
- Quality and affordable child care/elder care
- Leadership

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## Issue 3: Quality and affordable child care/elder care

Quality and affordable child care/elder care and special needs care were also identified as a pressing issue in Buchanan County. This issue is currently not being addressed by VCE and is addressed to a limited extent by other organizations. Local government agencies and Southwest Virginia Community are better equipped to address this with training; however, the problem seems to be one of lack of place and finance.

## Issue 4: Leadership

Focus group members felt a huge issue in Buchanan County is a future need for highly competent and focused leaders. VCE does address this issue through the 4-H Youth Development Program. 4-H teaches youth a variety of life skills such as: planning/organizing, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making as well as how to organize a meeting and discuss issues in a positive manner.

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