

Building the Next Generation of Appalachian Investors

How Monarch Learning Labs turned venture capital education into real, paid investment work for college students across the region.

For college students across Appalachia, venture capital represents a **meaningful opportunity to participate in the region's growing innovation economy**. Through the [Appalachian Emerging Investors Fund](#), Monarch Learning Labs helped make that opportunity practical, accessible, and connected to real investment work.

Monarch partnered with the [Roberts Impact Investing Fund](#) and the [Ford Foundation](#) to design and deliver a **10-week virtual microcredential course** introducing students to venture capital, social impact investing, and early-stage company evaluation. The first cohort included 70 students from West Virginia University, Marshall University, and Ohio University.

The course was built to do more than explain the field. It prepared students to step into paid Investment Analyst roles with a real regional fund.



The Opportunity

The Roberts Impact Investing Fund and the Ford Foundation set out to support a new venture-focused initiative in Appalachia, pairing a regional investment fund with an educational program for college students. M&S Consulting was selected to help manage the fund, while Monarch Learning Labs was brought in to develop and operate the learning experience.

The assignment fit Monarch's broader strength: turning complex subject matter into structured, usable training that helps learners move from understanding to application. Monarch needed to create a course that could serve students at multiple universities, clearly introduce specialized concepts, and prepare participants for applied work in a professional environment.

From Course to Career Pathway

The program was designed with a direct pathway into practice. Students who completed the course could apply for paid Investment Analyst roles with the Appalachian Emerging Investors Fund, earning \$20 per hour while contributing to real diligence and investment activity.

Following the first course, six students were selected for paid internships with the fund. Their work extended the learning experience beyond the classroom, giving them exposure to founder conversations, company evaluation, diligence materials, and Investment Committee preparation.

The Results

100%

indicated they would recommend the course to their peers

100%

strongly agreed that mentors and supervisors provided adequate support.

4.75/5

average internship satisfaction

4.5/5

average course satisfaction

100% of respondents reported gaining skills in:



Stakeholder Communication



Problem-Solving



Team Collaboration

Students described the experience as valuable, practical, and energizing. One student shared that the course gave them **“a great chance to meet founders and take a deep dive into the startup atmosphere.”** Another noted that learning venture capital terminology helped them **communicate more effectively** during the internship.

For **Monarch**, those results demonstrated the strength of its approach: expert-led instruction, thoughtful learning design, and applied experience working together to help students build real capability.

A Scalable Model for Workforce Development

The **Appalachian Emerging Investors Fund** is supported by a six-year commitment from the Ford Foundation, giving the program room to expand beyond its first cohort. The team is preparing to add more Appalachian colleges and universities in future years while continuing to refine the internship structure, diligence process, and student experience.

The case study reflects what Monarch does best: build learning experiences that turn complex fields into practical pathways. Whether training surgeons on new devices, preparing teams to operate advanced systems, or helping students explore venture capital, Monarch helps learners move from exposure to confidence, and from confidence to applied work.



About Monarch Learning Labs

Monarch Learning Labs delivers browser-based training built on expert-led instruction, interactive learning design, and scalable digital delivery. Designed for modern learners, Monarch helps make complex concepts accessible, practical, and easier to apply in real-world environments.

Based in the Appalachian region, Monarch partners with organizations committed to closing the gap between knowing and doing. With the Appalachian Emerging Investors Fund, Monarch helped build a learning experience that turns curiosity into capability and capability into real opportunity.