The North Carolina Appalachian Regional Commission Program

2016 Annual Strategy Statement

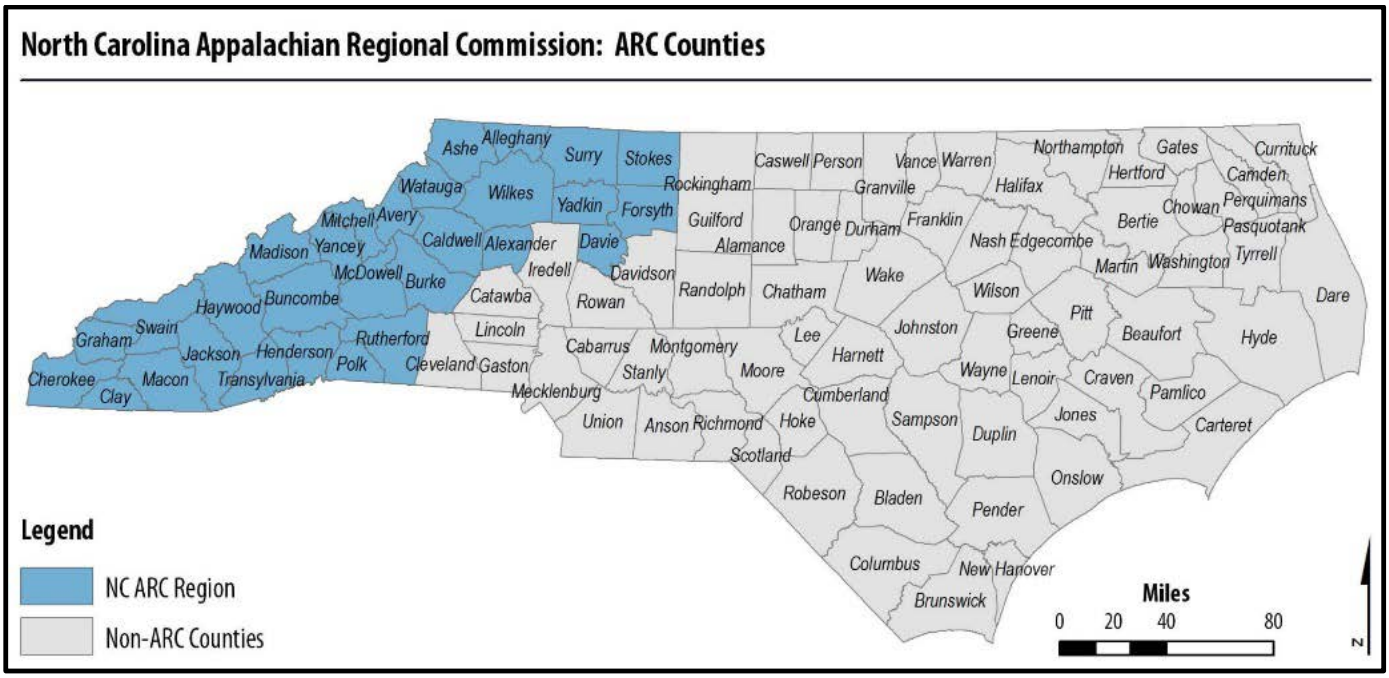
North Carolina ARC Annual Strategy Statement

In accordance with Section 5.3 of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Code, this document serves as North Carolina's ARC Annual Strategy Statement for Fiscal Year 2016 (October 1, 2015 – September 30, 2016). The purpose of the Strategy Statement is to establish a process to set forth goals, objectives, priorities, and policies for North Carolina's ARC counties. Implementation of the Strategy will continue to meet the diverse and shifting needs of ARC counties in North Carolina by targeting resources to assist in meeting those needs. The 2016 Strategy Statement:

1. Discusses the economic challenges and opportunities, as well as new developments and resources, that are impacting the state's Appalachian counties;
2. Provides an overview of targeted investment priorities for the program year;
3. Lays out specific state strategies for the state's Distressed Counties;
4. Sets forth the state operating program policies; and
5. Describes the methods used to review proposals to ensure an equitable allocation of state contributions for projects in its Appalachian area.

Governor Pat McCrory serves as North Carolina's Commission member; Dr. Patricia Mitchell, Assistant Secretary for Rural Development serves as his Alternate. The North Carolina Department of Commerce is responsible for the administration of the North Carolina ARC Program.

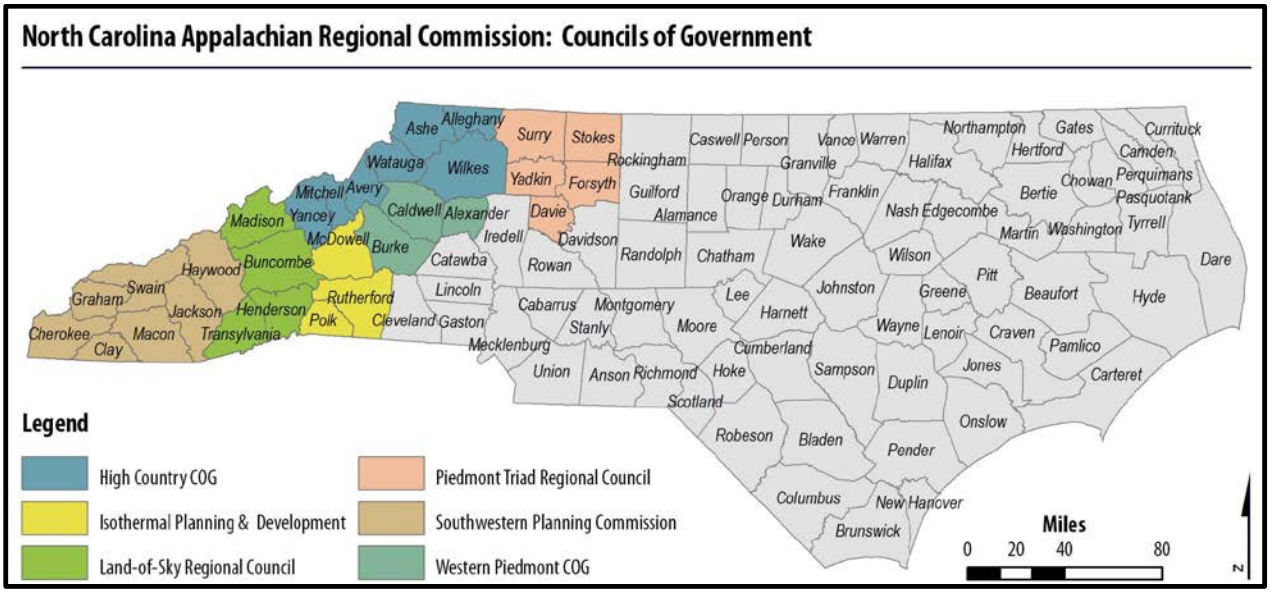
The Appalachian region of North Carolina consists of twenty-nine counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Davie, Forsyth, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Stokes, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, and Yancey.



The Region's six Local Development Districts (LDDs) and various state and federal agencies assist North Carolina's ARC Program with project development.

The Local Development Districts are:

- Southwestern Commission (Region A): Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties;
- Land-of-Sky Regional Council (Region B): Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties;
- Isothermal Planning & Development Commission (Region C): McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford counties;
- High Country Council of Governments (Region D): Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties;
- Western Piedmont Council of Governments (Region E): Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell counties; and
- Piedmont Triad Regional Council (Region G): Davie, Forsyth, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin counties.



Federal, State and Local Partners: The close cooperation between the federal, state, and local governments, along with the non-profit sector, ensures transparency and comprehensiveness in development of the North Carolina Appalachian Program. The Program collaborates with federal agencies that include: the United States Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Economic Development Administration, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. State agency partners include; the North Carolina Departments of Commerce, Agriculture and Consumer Services, Transportation, Health and Human Services, Environment and Natural Resources, and Cultural Resources. The North Carolina ARC Program also relies heavily on partnerships with various non-profits including, but not limited to, the North Carolina Rural Center, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, the Western North Carolina Community Foundation, the Conservation Fund, the Golden Leaf Foundation, the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities

The beginning of the 21st century dealt the region a major blow as manufacturing companies left the region, leaving many without jobs and the skills to transition into more advanced and technical-oriented economic opportunities. Ever resilient, Western North Carolina has taken up this latest challenge. Through collaborative partnerships at the federal, state and local levels, the region is actively pursuing a re-invention of old traditions. Local food and animal production, creating new opportunities by capitalizing on its regional assets and strengths, and further diversifying its portfolio with economic prosperity and sustainable development pursuits are creating and retaining local jobs.

Economic Challenges

The Appalachian Region of Western North Carolina faces many economic challenges and continues to struggle with:

Lack of Skilled Workforce/Unemployment: Although the region's unemployment rate has fallen since the 2008 national economic downturn it continues to exceed the state and national averages. The lack of a skilled workforce to meet the needs of a global, advanced manufacturing economy remains a challenge in addressing the region's higher unemployment rates.

Lack of Adequate Infrastructure: Outdated and scarce infrastructure continues to be problematic and impedes the region's ability to retain and grow viable business and industry sectors.

Utilities: Of the 29 counties; Alleghany, Clay, Cherokee, and Graham continue to lack natural gas local distribution companies due to funding issues and the high cost of extending service into these rocky, mountainous counties.

Water and Sewer**:** There is still a tremendous need for water and sewer infrastructure in the region. Communities throughout the area are beginning to think regionally when planning these types of infrastructure projects. State, federal, and non-profit grant funders are working together to help develop and fund quality infrastructure systems.

Broadband: The lack of adequate high speed internet service continues to be a barrier to economic development and competitive educational opportunities. While approximately 98% of WNC households have basic broadband access, ten counties – Alexander, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Polk, Rutherford, and Swain – still have below average access to basic broadband.

Lack of Local Leadership: Many of the region's communities do not have the capacity or leadership skills needed to engage its citizens and organizations or identify the needs, resources and opportunities they need to develop viable economic development strategies to move their communities forward.

Economic Opportunities

The Appalachian Region of Western North Carolina is rich in natural resources and talented citizenry. Tourism and agricultural-based ventures and advances in manufacturing continue to provide opportunities for economic growth. Areas of emerging economic opportunities exist in the following areas:

Building Adequate Infrastructure:

Broadband: Continuing to expand the reach of broadband and high speed internet capabilities to all WNC rural communities will increase educational and workforce training opportunities and encourage business and industry development.

Roads and Highways: Building and maintaining the region's transportation infrastructure will provide safer, more efficient and less costly commercial commodity transport, and community connectivity.

Increasing the Manufacturing Base: WNC has a strong craftsman tradition and these skills provide opportunities in both the region's returning textile industry and growing advanced manufacturing sectors – particularly in the aerospace and aviation, biotechnology and pharmaceutical, and the green and sustainable energy sectors.

Tourism: Revenues generated from tourist spending continue to bolster the region's economy. This sector offers excellent opportunities for WNC to continue to development new attractions and venues to draw visitors into their rural communities.

Workforce Development: Economic opportunity is dependent on a highly skilled workforce. WNC boasts fourteen community colleges, eight private and five public colleges and universities. With a strong network of accessible and customized educational training programs in WNC, students and returning adults have access to the resources they need to compete in emerging business and industry opportunities.

North Carolina Targeted Investment Priorities

Governor McCrory will use the resources provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission to assist him in meeting his goals for Western North Carolina, with an emphasis on the economy, education and efficiency.

Economy

The Governor will continue to support projects in the region that improve the economy and have an emphasis on job creation and job retention. He will place a priority on projects that improve citizens' access to workforce development programs, including programs that enhance a person's employable skills and help fill the region's employment gaps. The ARC program in North Carolina will continue to develop and promote the agricultural economy. Program staff will work with agriculture stakeholders to ensure resources are deployed to assist the increasing agricultural activity in the region. The Governor will utilize the ARC program to continue to provide technical assistance to small businesses and Main Street communities throughout the region. Potential projects may include infrastructure to an industrial site, the construction of access roads, the purchase of training equipment for a community college, and the provision of staff resources to support small business plan development.

Education

The Governor will continue to use ARC resources to support projects in the region that assist in strengthening the kindergarten through college education system. The Governor wants to improve this system to provide greater opportunities for career exploration and technical skill training. To enhance a community's education system, the ARC program in North Carolina will focus its assistance and resources on programs that teach

students both knowledge and job skills. The Governor is an advocate for both vocational and higher education and supports projects that provide opportunities for both of these educational areas of focus. The ARC program will support opportunities to strengthen the education delivery system so that the citizens of Appalachia have access to the educational tools necessary to succeed in the job market. The program will also support collaborative projects that bring together all levels of the education system, Pre-K, K-12, community college and universities. The Governor will use the ARC program to increase access to technology in the classroom. Potential projects could include computers for schools, equipment for training programs, teleconferencing equipment for a community college training room, and funding for dropout prevention programs.

Efficiency of Government

Because of to the Governor's focus on improving the efficiency of government, in order to provide better customer service to the citizens of the state, he will use ARC program resources to increase local government's capacity to deliver necessary services. ARC resources will be used to assist local governments in accessing state and/or federal resources that can help communities serve their citizens in a more effective manner. Potential projects include the installation of a new water treatment facilities and access roads, to provide water and transportation corridors for new business development. ARC resources could also be used to help lead a local government or regional organization through a strategic planning effort that identifies their economic drivers.

Strategies for Distressed Counties

North Carolina places special emphasis on the four counties, Cherokee, Graham, Rutherford and Swain, that ARC has designated as Distressed for FY2016. These counties will receive access to additional technical assistance and participate in additional project planning workshops so they are better prepared to submit applications that will achieve enhanced capacity and assist in moving their communities towards increased economic prosperity. County teams will be organized by the respective LDD Director. Teams will represent a cross-section of the community. Potential team members could be: County Manager, Mayor, School Board Member, Small Business Owner, Teacher, Non-Profit Executive Director, and Local Economic Developer. Teams must have at least five individuals, but no more than ten. Teams will be invited to attend a project development workshop to be held in May of 2016. Following that workshop the application timeline will apply. However, these dates are submit to change. All application materials will be published on-line at www.nccommerce.com/rd/arc.

- Distressed County Pre-Application Packet published on-line May 1, 2016
- Pre-Applications will be due on June 30, 2016
- Applications will be invited to submit full applications by August 19, 2016
- Full Applications will be due on October 3, 2016
- Governor’s Distressed County Project Recommendations will be submitted to ARC by November 18, 2016

North Carolina ARC Operating Policies

In North Carolina the level of ARC funds requested may not exceed 50% of the total project cost; except: 1) in designated at-risk and distressed counties where the state determines the project is not feasible without the injection of a higher percentage of Appalachian dollars; and 2) in multijurisdictional projects that meet requirements set out in the Appalachian Regional Development Reform Act of 1998, which generally involve the participation of distressed counties. The level of ARC funds requested for projects in designated competitive counties may not exceed 30% of the total project cost unless the applicant provides adequate justification to

meet exceptions in the ARC Code. Projects involving designated attainment counties must be multi-county in scope and meet the stringent criteria defined in the 1998 law.

Proposals for the following activities are not eligible: construction of schools, libraries, government offices, hospitals, community centers, social services facilities, law enforcement facilities, or day-use recreational facilities. However, the ARC program will consider the jobs created by these and other facilities as part of the justification for water and wastewater projects. Generally- funding is not available to cultural facilities and activities; however, activities related to sustainable development initiatives may be considered where the jobs and wealth resulting from those activities can be documented and are equivalent to the performance measures generated by more traditional economic development and entrepreneurial activities.

The state will work with its LDDs, local governments, and basic agencies to continue its efforts to obligate its ARC allocation in a timely manner and to achieve dual objectives of better serving applicants and more efficiently initiating ARC's investments in North Carolina.

General Information

- All application materials will be published on-line at www.nccommerce.com/rd/arc.
- Higher priority is given to projects that are deemed ready to go. To meet this requirement the applicant should have all other funding for the project committed.
- Both the worth of the individual project in achieving the State's objectives and the level of assistance are determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Initial screening of proposals focuses on the following elements:
  - Feasibility of the project approach;
  - Eligibility under ARC Code and Appalachian Act;
  - Consistency with State and Commission goals and strategies;
  - Economic impact within the context of the region and the area to be served.
- ARC assistance is the source of last resort. As such, projects may only use ARC funds where there is no other source of funding and/or where Commission money will make a project feasible.
- Project applications must include measurable outputs and outcomes that are consistent with federal performance measurement requirements.
- Individuals and for-profit enterprises are not eligible for direct grant assistance; but may benefit from, and be served by, the investment of ARC funds.
- Special provisions related to operating projects:
  - ARC funding for operating projects normally will be limited to start-up costs and two years of operation (three years of assistance);
  - No project will be guaranteed more than one year of support and applicants are advised that projects requesting multiple year funding generally will not be given a high priority;
  - Any project requesting start-up funds should be prepared to identify the sources that will underwrite the costs after the first year of Appalachian aid;
  - Generally, continuation projects (those operating in multiple years with no appreciable changes in project design or scope) should reduce the level of ARC support by 10% of the amount of their previous grant or show other efforts to enhance the program attaining self-sufficiency;
  - Operating projects also will be encouraged to propose an 18-month initial project period. Since most projects need this additional time to meet unexpected start up delays, the proposed longer

performance period should help avoid the need to extend project periods to meet the first year's objectives;
  - Any project seeking continuation funding (a second or third application for assistance) will need to initiate discussions with the State's ARC office at least a month in advance of the application submission deadline in order to determine if an application will be considered. Prior to seeking continuation consideration, the project sponsors should compile information documenting satisfactory performance in meeting the accepted output and outcome measures to support the request for continued assistance.
- Decisions to consider projects for Appalachian funding are based on summary information that provides enough detail to enable the State ARC office to determine the proposal's eligibility. Construction projects should have preliminary commitment of jobs and a preliminary engineering report prior to requesting consideration. Construction projects also must obtain the review and approval of another federal grant-financing agency, and any ARC funding consideration is contingent upon obtaining the participation of another federal agency.

Funding and Match Guidance

- The state has set a general guideline that ARC assistance will not exceed $300,000 for construction projects, $100,000 for non-construction projects and will constitute no more than 50% of the total project cost. However; special consideration will be given to infrastructure projects in distressed and at-risk counties. Selected projects may request up to $500,000 in ARC funding. Special consideration may also be given to non-construction projects with an emphasis on workforce development and education with an allowable funding amount up to $300,000.
- The level of ARC funds requested for projects in designated competitive counties may not exceed 30% of the project cost unless justification is provided to meet exceptions in the ARC Code.
- To comply with Congressional instructions, the matching requirements in multicounty projects will vary, depending on the designated economic status of the counties involved. Multicounty projects serving fewer than the 29 counties will be computed based on the average of the eligible financing level for the counties involved.
- Cost overruns and significant changes of project scope on previously approved ARC projects generally will not be considered for funding. Changes required by design modifications or changes that will generate additional jobs will constitute rationales for consideration of overrun requests.
- ARC funds cannot supplant or diminish the level of other funds (federal, state, or local) going into the Appalachian region or the project area. ARC funds cannot replace other funds to continue a project, nor may ARC funds be used to allow the diversion of existing resources to other purposes or to reduce the amount of bonds to be sold to finance local improvements.
- This application process will allow the Program to continue to be responsive to local needs while ensuring timely obligation of ARC funds.
- Applicants are encouraged to work closely with other agencies involved in their project to meet the cut-off dates. Proposals involving construction should be especially aware of the time constraints and applicants should alert their engineers to strictly observe these time deadlines.

General Funding Timeline

- Pre-Application Packet published on-line March 1, 2016.
- Pre-Applications will be due on April 15, 2016.
- Applications will be invited to submit full applications by May 13, 2016.
- Full Applications will be due on June 30, 2016.
- Governor's Project Recommendations will be submitted to ARC by September 2, 2016.