



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Strategic Planning, Meeting Facilitation, and Strategic Plan Writing

Open Date: December 9, 2014

Proposal Due Date: January 12, 2015

Summary of Scope of Work

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) seeks contractual support for a qualified team of planners, facilitators, and writers to assist the agency in development of a new strategic plan. Selected contractor(s) will work closely with ARC and its local and state partners to shape this new effort over the course of a nine-month period beginning in January 2015 and concluding by September 30, 2015.

The scope of work includes some or all of the following activities, based on contractor expertise and Commission needs:

- Work session with ARC staff to shape the planning process, in Washington, D.C.;
- Meeting design and facilitation for four public listening sessions in the Appalachian Region;
- Meeting design and facilitation for one input session with members of Appalachia's local development districts, in Washington, D.C.;
- Meeting design and facilitation for up to eight focus group discussions with regional experts and constituency groups identified by ARC, at different locations in the Appalachian Region;
- Design of tool or process for gathering input from the public online through social media and other venues;
- Work session with ARC staff to synthesize major themes and critical issues identified through input sessions, in Washington, D.C.;
- Work session with ARC federal and state representatives to reach consensus on agency vision, mission, strategic goals, objectives, and activities, at a location in the Appalachian Region;
- Writing and graphic design of the strategic plan document.

Proposals must include an overall estimate for all work in the proposal, as well as hourly and daily rates; and must include estimated costs of travel to locations in the Appalachian Region for listening sessions and focus groups, and to Washington, D.C., for sessions with ARC staff. We anticipate that the strategic planning process will include travel for up to thirteen meetings in the Appalachian Region and up to three meetings in Washington, D.C. Proposals should also factor in time for multiple conference calls and/or Skype sessions with the ARC Strategic Planning Committee throughout the process.

Proposals should not include a budget for logistical support for listening sessions and focus groups in the Region, travel support for community members and invited guests, audio-visual needs, meeting space rental, food and refreshments, or mass printing and distribution of the strategic plan. It is anticipated that local hosts in the Region will assist with invitations, registration and on-site logistical support for listening sessions and focus groups, as needed.

Proposals will be evaluated based on contractors' qualifications, expertise, track record, writing samples, and cost-effectiveness.

Background

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget requires agencies to periodically update their strategic plans. Strategic plans identify an agency's mission, long-term goals, objectives, and strategies, as well as the approaches it will take in monitoring its progress in addressing specific challenges and opportunities related to its mission. The strategic plan also explains the importance of the goals, appraises the agency's capabilities, assesses the operating environment, and outlines the process for ongoing evaluations to inform agency actions.

ARC's current strategic plan expires in fiscal year 2016. Therefore the Commission is undertaking the process of developing a new strategic plan to guide ARC investments in Appalachia from fiscal year 2016 through fiscal year 2020. This process will include research on the Region's socioeconomic trends, analysis of emerging issues and opportunities, and input from the Region's citizens and regional experts on a variety of topics. Through the strategic planning process, the Commission will explore common issues and identify emerging opportunities to promote economic progress for the Region's communities.

Strategic Planning Overview

The Appalachian Regional Commission recently approved a process by which the agency will update its current strategic plan. ARC Regional Planning and Research staff, with contracted assistance, will oversee this effort, with extensive participation by the federal co-chair, officials from the thirteen Appalachian states and members of the Appalachian Region's local development districts, and a broad cross section of critical stakeholders in the Appalachian Region, including economic development professionals and local entrepreneurs, funders and investors, local government professionals and civic leaders, educators and students, academicians and researchers, the philanthropic and non-profit community, and Appalachia's youth population.

As a first step in the process, ARC in 2013 commissioned research to quantify and document changes to Appalachia since ARC's inception in 1965, to evaluate ARC's contribution to the Region's economic development during this time period, and to determine to what extent Appalachia remains "a region apart," geographically and statistically, from the rest of the nation. The research is nearing completion and a report on the findings, including an executive summary, will be published in early 2015, along with a companion Web site that will be available to the general public. The research findings will form the foundation for engaging ARC's local and regional partners in a comprehensive, forward-looking process to update its current strategic plan.

Scope of Work

1. Input Sessions

Gathering input from partners and stakeholders will take multiple forms:

First, ARC plans to hold up to four listening sessions across the Appalachian Region. The location and agenda of these sessions will be decided in consultation with ARC officials and state and local hosts. Contractors should note that there may be as many as 150 individuals from a broad cross section of the community engaged in each of these half-day discussions.

Second, ARC plans to conduct a listening session in Washington, D.C., with members of Appalachia's 73 local development districts (LDDs). LDDs are multi-county planning and development organizations that cover all of the 420 counties in Appalachia; they are critical local partners in ARC's economic development efforts. The LDDs' most important role is identifying priority needs of local communities. Based on these needs, the LDDs work with their board members and other local citizens to develop plans for their communities' economic development, to target and meet the most pressing needs, and to build community unity and leadership. There may be as many as 300 LDD members present at the listening session.

Third, ARC will supplement the listening sessions with a series of focus groups on topics relevant to economic development in Appalachia, including, but not limited to, transportation and global trade, manufacturing, education and workforce development, health, and tourism. Some focus groups may involve specific constituency groups identified by the ARC, such as funders and the philanthropic community, and Appalachia's youth. ARC will work with the selected contractor(s) to identify the location and agenda of these focus groups. Focus groups will typically include up to 25 individuals.

Fourth, ARC plans to use technology to facilitate public engagement in the strategic planning process. Proposals should outline technologies contractors will use for this purpose.

The purpose of these input sessions is to help ARC recognize existing barriers to economic development in the Region, learn about promising strategies for economic transition, and identify partnership opportunities to help the Commission advance its mission.

2. Work Sessions

The planning process will include three work sessions with ARC staff and federal and state stakeholders. The first work session will be with ARC staff in Washington, D.C., to help develop and design the listening sessions and focus groups. The second work session will be with ARC staff, in Washington, D.C., to synthesize major themes and critical issues identified in the input sessions and to draft the strategic plan's mission, goals, objectives, and performance targets. The final work session will be held at a venue in the Appalachian Region, with ARC federal and state representatives, to reach consensus on ARC's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and activities, and to finalize the plan.

3. Writing and Graphic Design of the Strategic Plan Document

The next step in the process will include writing the strategic plan document, in close consultation with the ARC Strategic Plan Committee, and graphic design of the document. The document will be presented to the Commission for adoption in October 2015. After the strategic plan is formally adopted, ARC will submit it electronically to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, post it on the ARC Web site, and print and distribute the document as appropriate.

The strategic planning process will result in a comprehensive plan that will guide ARC and its federal, state, and local partners in taking action toward bringing Appalachia into full economic parity with the nation. It will outline goals and objectives that provide guidance for priorities based on considerable research, extensive input from a variety of stakeholders, and consensus on priority goals and emerging opportunities for action. The plan will create a framework for building on past accomplishments to help Appalachia move forward.

Strategic Planning Process

The four phases of the process are outlined below. The broad outlines of the strategic planning process have been approved by the Commission. Phase I is already underway and is beyond the scope of this RFP. Contracted assistance is needed to assist with phases II, III, and IV of this work.

ARC reserves the right to select multiple contractors to assist with any of these phases, based on the needs of the agency and the expertise of selected contractor(s).

Phase I: Research and Assessment: October 2014–February 2015 (*Outside the scope of this RFP*)

- Analysis of demographic trends changes in Appalachia (underway).
- Economic impact of ARC programs (underway).
- Initial discussion of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for critical investment (underway).

Phase II: Listening and Input: February–July 2015

- ARC staff work session to shape the input phase.
- Up to four “listening sessions” at different locations in Appalachia to engage a broad cross section of citizens in a discussion of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for economic development in their communities.
- One listening session in Washington, D.C., with members of Appalachia’s local development districts.
- Up to eight focus groups with regional experts and constituency groups to gain in-depth knowledge and foster substantive conversation on individual topics, particularly those identified as “emerging opportunities” for the Appalachian Region. These may include transportation, health, export trade, tourism, manufacturing, and education/workforce training, among others.
- Online feedback from the general public via social media and other tools.

Phase III: Synthesis and Options: June-July 2015

- Work session in Washington, D.C., with ARC staff to synthesize major themes and critical issues identified in Phase II input sessions, and to draft agency vision, mission, goals, and objectives for consideration by Commission members at their July 2015 meeting.

Phase IV: Consensus and Strategy: July–October 2015

- Work session with ARC federal and state representatives to finalize ARC’s vision and mission, and reach consensus on agency goals, objectives, and performance targets for the strategic plan.
- Writing and graphic design of the strategic plan document.
- Presentation of strategic plan document to the Commission for adoption.
- Submittal of strategic plan to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

Emerging Opportunities Framework

The Appalachian Region has historically been dominated by a few industries, such as mining, textiles, tobacco, and timber. This is particularly true in its most economically distressed counties. Dependence on these industries as economic drivers and employers has left many communities vulnerable to economic fluctuations. In light of this, the Commission and its local and regional partners have begun a robust conversation on ways entrepreneurs and investors can accelerate economic progress in Appalachia by strategically focusing activities on sectors of the economy that research has shown to have a high rate of return on investment. These include, but are not limited to, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, health care, tourism, and local food systems. The goal is not to exclude investments and development

activities in other areas, such as transportation and water and wastewater infrastructure, but to help limit economic vulnerability, develop home-grown economic opportunities, and diversify local economies. Ultimately this would expand local job opportunities, increase locally rooted wealth, and create more resilient communities. Proposals should note that the Commission plans to use “emerging opportunities” as the thematic framework for the strategic planning process. Listening sessions and focus group discussions will increase understanding of these emerging opportunities and suggest ways the Commission can help focus resources and create partnerships in this arena.

About the Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission is a regional economic development agency representing a unique partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, the Commission is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts with boards made up of elected officials, businesspeople, and other local leaders. Each year Congress appropriates funds for Commission programs, which ARC allocates among its member states. The governors draw up annual state Appalachian strategies and select for ARC approval grant investments to implement them. ARC investments include water and wastewater systems; education, job-training, and health-care programs; and other essentials of comprehensive community economic development.

The Commission’s structure as a federal-state-local partnership and as a regional agency makes it uniquely suited to help guide and foster the local efforts required for change. Unlike economic development agencies that are primarily categorical grant makers, the Commission performs advocacy, regional planning, and research activities in combination with its special grant programs. No other entity has this regional mandate for Appalachia.

About Appalachia

Appalachia, as defined in the legislation from which the Appalachian Regional Commission derives its authority, is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. The Appalachian Region includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Appalachia has made significant progress in addressing its historical challenges. Appalachia has come a long way in the past five decades: its poverty rate, 33 percent in 1960, was 16.6 percent over the 2008–2012 period. The number of high-poverty counties in the Region (those with poverty rates more than 1.5 times the U.S. average) declined from 295 in 1960 to 107 over the 2008–2012 period. Nevertheless, ARC’s mission has not yet been completed. The majority of the Region’s communities still do not enjoy the same economic vitality and living conditions as the rest of the nation. Central Appalachia in particular continues to battle economic distress, concentrated areas of poverty, high unemployment rates, educational disparities, poor health, and population outmigration. And recent economic data show that the Region fared far worse in the 2007-2009 recession than the rest of the nation.

Cost Proposal

Proposals can be submitted by teams of contractors or by individual contractors. ARC reserves the right to hire multiple contractors, as needed, to cover the scope of work within this RFP.

Proposals must include an estimate for all work in the proposal, as well as hourly and daily rates; and must include estimated costs of travel to locations in the Appalachian Region for listening sessions and

focus groups, and to Washington, D.C., for sessions with ARC staff. We anticipate that the strategic planning process will include travel for up to thirteen meetings in the Appalachian Region and up to three meetings in Washington, D.C. Proposals should also factor in time for multiple conference calls and/or Skype sessions with the ARC Strategic Planning Committee throughout the process.

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ARC policy on allowable indirect overhead costs for university-based contracts is to permit universities to charge the same rates charged to their own state agencies.

Proposal Submission

The proposal submission should not exceed ten pages, with other pages appended as supplemental material; and should:

1. Describe the applicant's background and organization, emphasizing previous work in related areas and associated outcomes, and geographic areas of focus. Include full resumes and writing samples in an appendix.
2. Provide a fee schedule for the scope of work, noting hourly and daily rates charged. All travel to meetings in the Appalachian Region and to Washington, D.C., must be included in the price proposal.

Proposals are due on or before 5:00 pm EST on January 12, 2015.

Please send proposals as a PDF file to:

Kostas C. Skordas
Director,
Division of Regional Planning and Research
Appalachian Regional Commission
Washington, DC
kskordas@arc.gov

Proposal Evaluation

ARC will select one or more contractors through a competitive process based on:

- Background and experience in strategic planning and economic development.
- Background and experience working with Appalachian communities.
- Background and experience working with rural and/or economically distressed communities.
- Meeting design expertise, facilitation skills, and group process skills.
- Quality of writing, based on samples of work.
- Use of technology to facilitate input from stakeholders.
- Cost effectiveness of proposal.

It is anticipated that (a) contractor(s) will be selected by late January 2015.

Additional Resources

Information on ARC is available at www.arc.gov

ARC research reports are available at www.arc.gov/research

ARC's current strategic plan, *Moving Appalachia Forward, Appalachian Regional Commission Strategic Plan 2011-2016*, is available at

<http://www.arc.gov/images/newsroom/publications/sp/ARCStrategicPlan2011-2016.pdf> (PDF: 3.7 MB)

Information on federal agency strategic planning requirements can be found on the White House Web site at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a11_current_year_a11_toc