

Mississippi's Annual Strategy Statement Fiscal Year 2016

Each year, the thirteen Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) states publish strategy statements outlining their plans for the use of ARC funds in their designated ARC service areas. Programs and activities benefiting the residents of those areas are eligible to receive consideration for funding from the funds designated by Congress for that purpose.

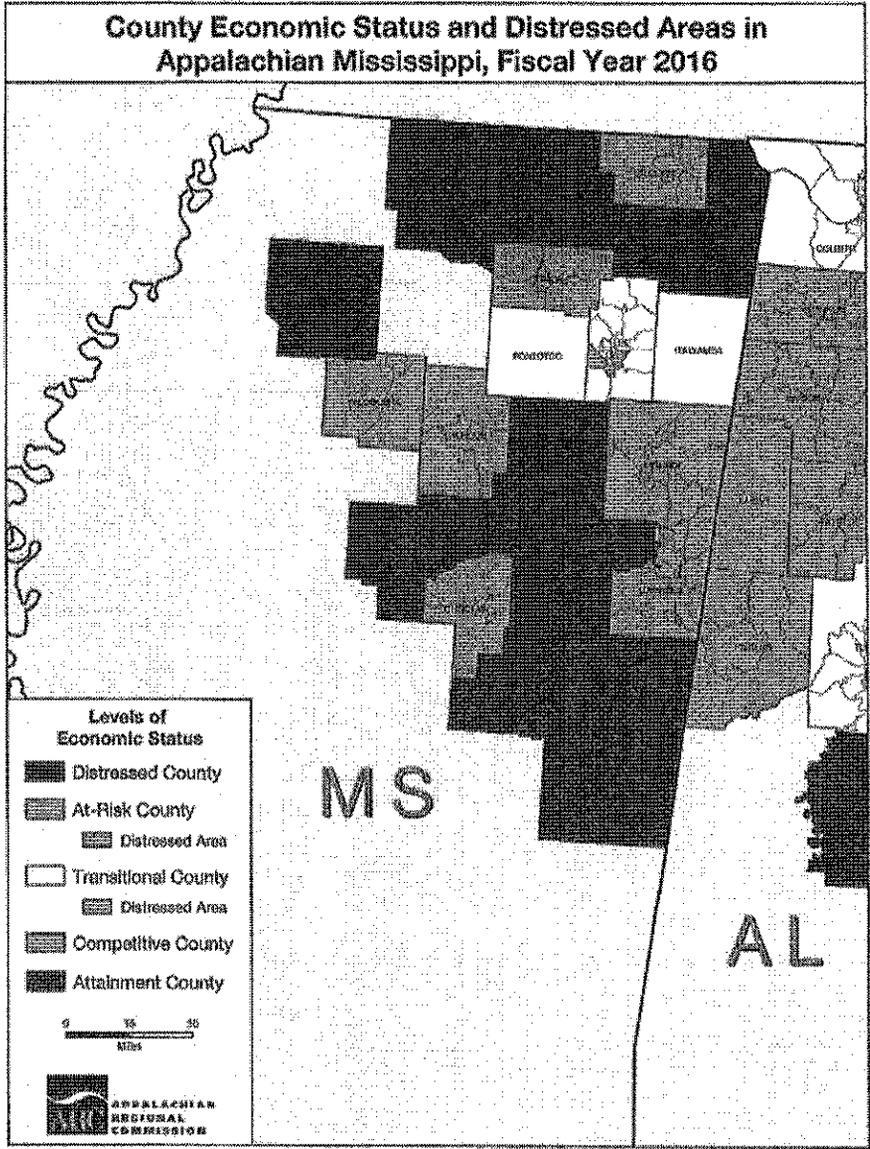
The Appalachian Regional Commission is a regional economic development agency, representing a partnership of federal, state, and local governments, designed to address local needs. ARC is comprised of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the President of the United States. Grassroots participation is provided through state support and multi-county development organizations called planning and development districts (PDDs). Each year Congress appropriates funds, which ARC allocates among its member states.

The Mississippi ARC program is led by the Governor's Office. Administrative responsibilities and day-to-day operations for the Mississippi ARC program have been assigned by Governor Bryant to the Director of the Appalachian Regional Office (ARO) and State Program Manager, Mr. Mike Armour. Mr. Armour is supported in the day-to-day operations at the regional level by senior associate manager, Sandra Perkins.

Mississippi ARC Program staff work with six (6) Planning and Development Districts in ARC project development and implementation. The Executive Director and staff of Mississippi's ARC PDDs work with their board members, elected officials, citizens, and economic developers to identify needs of their local communities.

The Appalachian Region of Mississippi consist of twenty-four counties: Alcorn, Benton, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Clay, Itawamba, Kemper, Lee, Lowndes, Marshall, Monroe, Montgomery,

Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Union, Webster, Winston, and Yalobusha.



Mississippi Appalachia’s Annual Strategy Statements for Fiscal Year 2016 lie within the scope of national ARC’s Five-Year Strategy Plan:

Goal 1: Economic Opportunities

Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia’s economy.

Goal 2: Ready Workforce

Improve the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.

Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure

Invest in critical infrastructure-especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Highway System; and water/wastewater system.

Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets

Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.

Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity

Build the capacity and skills of current and next generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Mississippi continues to recover from loss of manufacturing jobs in the region. The loss of these jobs left many without jobs and the skills to transition into more advanced and technical oriented economic opportunities. Lack of adequate infrastructure continues to be a problem. Provision of reliable water and wastewater systems is essential for furthering economic development growth. The lack of adequate high speed internet service continues to be a barrier to economic development and competitive educational opportunities. Our region suffers from both unemployment and under employment. Addressing these areas, will be key factors in creating more and better paying jobs and a sustainable tax base.

Through collaborative partnerships at the federal, state and local level, Mississippi is creating new opportunities in targeted industries such as advanced manufacturing, automobile and parts manufacturing, aerospace and aviation, clean energy, metal fabrication and steel, and advanced materials.

Mississippi's Targeted Investments

Enhance entrepreneurial activity

- Support initiatives that nurture new and existing business by creating technical assistance networks through business incubators, business associations, and private-sector resources.
- Support efforts to improve access to investment capital.
- Support initiatives to develop businesses in the Creative Economy.
- Support programs that will educate current and future entrepreneurs at K-12 schools, community colleges, universities, and jobs training centers.

Enhance workforce training

- Provide support and incentives to community and junior colleges that provide programs to develop critical workforce skills, both for existing business and industry and targeted new business and industry.
- Support the integration of skills training and knowledge of workplace requirements across and into K-12 educational and training curricula. This will match students at a younger age to real employment opportunities.
- Support innovative ways to re-tool skills of the region's workforce.
- Support the modernization and expansion of workforce training and occupational education programs.
- Leverage support for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs from middle school through university.

Provide basic infrastructure

Water and Sewer

- Make strategic investments that leverage federal, state, local and private capital for the development and improvement of water, wastewater, and basic utility systems.

Roads, Rails, Ports and Highways

- Support local access roads that create or retain jobs.
- Support planning and construction of intermodal transportation networks.

Broadband

- Make strategic investments in new technologies infrastructure to increase local and regional access.
- Support telemedicine applications for communities.

Develop and market strategic assets for local economics

- Support efforts to institutionalize the capacity to assist communities in identifying local and regional assets for development, including assets in rails to trails, arts, music, history and other Creative Economy sectors.
- Support efforts to maximize the economic benefits of Mississippi Appalachian tourism and crafts industries through regional and cooperative marketing opportunities.
- Support development of strategies to help new and existing businesses capitalize on local assets.

Increase healthy living programs and access to healthcare and healthcare professionals

- Provide start-up incentives to communities establishing healthy living programs.
- Support local efforts to expand access to healthcare programs and recruit healthcare professionals through the J-1 Visa Waiver Program and other programs.

- Support educational institutions that identify healthcare needs and train professionals to help meet those needs.
- Promote nutrition education, healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and early screening as means of reducing or eliminating the incidence of health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

Appalachian Development Highway System

The completion of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS), created in 1965, will offer an important contribution to economic growth in Appalachian Mississippi. The Northeastern Mississippi Appalachian Development Highway System consists of Corridor X and Corridor V. Corridor V runs from Fulton to the Alabama state line and Corridor X runs from I-55 at Batesville to the Alabama state line.

The relationship between economic growth and transportation is a major focus of the Mississippi ARC counties; inadequate transportation has been a major obstacle in retaining and attracting businesses and industry. Even though vast improvements have been made, the region still does not have an adequate transportation system to support dynamic economic development. The Mississippi ARC continues to be a strong partner in reducing transportation barriers.

Distressed Counties

The strategies set forth in this annual plan as well as the four-year plan apply in particular to Mississippi Appalachia's distressed counties. Additionally, Mississippi's plan in FY 2016 for distressed Appalachian Counties is to continue to help citizens and officials develop self-sufficiency and sustainable economic development plans.

Further, the Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office will continue its series of meetings with Planning and Development Districts, local economic development organizations, and local

governments to enhance capacity to prepare and submit improved grant proposals from distressed counties.

For Fiscal Year 2016 Mississippi has fourteen (14) distressed counties, Benton, Chickasaw, Clay, Kemper, Marshall, Montgomery, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Panola, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Webster, and Winston, that ARC has designed as Distressed for Fiscal Year 2016.

Mississippi State Policies

The Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office will focus on areas of highest need, areas suffering from economic distress, areas with existing health hazards, areas where projects will have the most impact, and areas that are not able to help themselves. Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must contain performance measures, outputs and outcomes consistent with those set by the Commission in their Performance Plan for FY 2016. The Planning and Development Districts (PDD) are encouraged to solicit as many proposals as possible within their service area so that the needs of the Appalachian people can be identified. The Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office staff will continue to work with the PDDs, local government officials, economic developers, non-profits, and Mississippi Development Authority to address the needs of Mississippi Appalachian citizens.

There are certain types of projects which are inappropriate for federal funding. Except for unusual circumstances, which will be fully documented and explained, the following type of activity will not be eligible for ARC funding in Mississippi. Projects related to the operation of local government. This includes construction of city halls, courthouses, jails, etc. as well as salaries and operating cost related to government functions. This restriction will not, however, extend to programs operated by local government that provide direct service to the residents of the Mississippi ARC region such as education or health services

The Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office staff will screen all project applications to determine if they are eligible for funding consideration. The screening process will determine the following:

- Application completeness, accuracy, and feasibility of project approach
- Eligibility under ARC Code
- Consistent with the State's Strategies and Commission's Strategic Plan
- Need for ARC Assistance
- Project readiness
- Availability of matching funds
- Timeline of project activities
- Performance measures established
- Sustainability plan

Application Timeline

- Mississippi ARC Application Workshop – November, 2015
- Pre-Application Deadline – January, 2016
- Governor's Selection of projects – February 2016
- Submission of Applications to ARC Washington – March/April 2016

Mississippi does not put a firm dollar cap on the amount of funding a participant can request. The funding levels are limited by the ARC Code based on county classification (distressed or transitional) and the type of project (access road). However, the Governor reserves the right to approve or reject the requested amount of ARC funding for the project and does not have to award funds at the maximum funding level.

Funding for operational grants is usually limited to an initial year and one year's continuation if deemed necessary. No project is guaranteed more than one year of support. Generally, ARC funds will be reduced in the second year's funding if a project merits second year funding. Operational proposals should include a plan for continuing the program after ARC funds are expended.

ARC participation cost will be limited to 50% of project costs, with the following exceptions:

1. For projects located in ARC designated distressed counties, the maximum grant will be 80% of project costs.
2. For projects located in ARC designated at risk counties, the maximum grant will be 70% of project costs with a corresponding match of 30%.
3. ARC assistance for multi-county projects in which at least half the counties are distressed may be increased to as much as 80% of project costs; if at least one, but less than half, of the counties area distressed, ARC assistance is limited to the higher of 50% or the average percentage applicable to the counties in the project. Multi – county projects that include area development counties and distressed counties must have job creation in order to be considered for funding. The multi-county projects will be partly funded from distressed county funds and area development funds based on the number of distressed counties and non-distressed counties identified in the project.

At any time during the fiscal year, the ARO, with the permission of the Governor and the ARC Alternate, reserves the right to fast tract a project to supersede all applications when the project will create private sector or high wage jobs. The better and the higher paying the jobs, in comparison with prevailing local employment characteristics, the more aggressive the Mississippi Appalachian Regional Office will be in designating the project an Economic Development Priority.

The Governor may reserve the right to recommend projects for final approval that are not included in the enclosed list of objectives and strategies but are consistent with the goals and objectives outlines in ARC's Strategic Plan and Mississippi's 4-Year Plan.