

**Appalachian Regional Commission  
Request for Proposals**

**POWER Initiative: Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Proposals due on or before the close of business  
June 28, 2018**

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## Appalachian Regional Commission Request for Proposals

### POWER Initiative (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization): Monitoring and Evaluation

#### I. Overview of Request for Proposals

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) invites proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to **monitor and evaluate the impacts of the POWER Initiative to date**. POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) is a congressionally funded initiative that targets federal resources to help communities that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production.

This assessment will encompass approximately 125 POWER grants funded by ARC and other federal, state, and local partners in Fiscal Years 2015-2017, and may include approximately POWER grants (estimate 60) as they are awarded by ARC in Fiscal Year 2018. POWER grants are organized into four broad development categories: workforce development, broadband and telecommunications, entrepreneurship, and business cluster development. POWER grants range in funding amount from \$50,000 to over \$3 million. For additional information about the POWER Initiative and a summary of POWER grant investments made to date see [www.arc.gov/power](http://www.arc.gov/power).

The Commission's purpose for this RFP is to **determine the extent to which POWER grantees are progressing toward their stated performance outputs and outcomes**. Given that the majority of POWER grants are still being implemented (considered "open"), contractors must ensure appropriate methodologies are used to gather all necessary information in an efficient and effective manner. This will first involve discussion about the POWER Initiative with key ARC program staff and a detailed review of POWER grant information in ARC's internal grants management database (ARC.net) and in print files kept by the Commission. Then, in close consultation with ARC staff, contractor will develop and implement an appropriate data collection process to monitor and assess grant-specific performance outputs and outcomes. This will include synthesizing information provided via interim progress reports from POWER grantees, direct communication with POWER grantees (e.g., phone interviews, online questionnaires, and targeted onsite field visits) to clarify or obtain performance outputs/outcomes, direct communications with ARC program staff to supplement or obtain data on performance outputs/outcomes, and/or other methodologies proposed by the contractor.

Deliverables for this contract include monthly reports to ARC staff that provide a snapshot of grantee performance during each period. It is important to note that these monthly reports will include only a subset of POWER grants, rather than the entire portfolio. The purpose of these monthly reports will be to track the progress of POWER grantees toward their economic development goals, highlight success stories, flag potential issues or challenges, and recommend technical assistance and training needs for

grantees as needed, particularly in performance monitoring and evaluation. Selected contractors will be asked to participate in monthly POWER conference calls to present and discuss information found in each monthly report.

Deliverables also include participation in periodic POWER summits/workshops and Commission meetings as requested (estimate 5-6 events per year). POWER summits are biannual gatherings of POWER grantees to share project successes and challenges while POWER workshops inform potential new applicants about the POWER Initiative. These events are critical forums for providing technical assistance and guidance to POWER grantees, the Commission and its state and local partners. Travel to these events should be included in the budget.

Information gathered through this entire effort will inform ARC and its state and local partners on ways to better develop, assess, and manage POWER grants, and enhance the agency's ability for documenting and reporting program impacts for future use. Additionally, this process will help grantees strengthen their own ability to document and improve effectiveness, ultimately building capacity for critical economic development organizations throughout Appalachia.

## **II. Background**

### **About Appalachia**

The Appalachian Region, as defined in ARC's authorizing legislation, is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It 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. Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population.

The Appalachian Region's economy, which was once highly dependent on extractive industries, has become more diversified in recent times and now includes larger shares of manufacturing and professional services, among other industries. Appalachia has made significant progress over the past five decades: its poverty rate, which was 31 percent in 1960, had fallen to 17.2 percent over the 2010–2014 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 93 today.

These gains have transformed the Region from one of widespread poverty to one of economic contrasts: some communities have successfully diversified their economies, while others still require basic infrastructure such as roads, clinics, and water and sewer systems. The contrasts are not surprising in light of the Region's size and diversity—the Region includes 420 counties in 13 states, extends more than 1,000 miles from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi, and is home to more than 25 million people.

## **About the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)**

In the mid-1960s, at the urging of two U.S. presidents, Congress enacted legislation to address the persistent poverty and growing economic despair of the Appalachian Region.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states, as well as a federal co-chair appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts.

ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia. ARC funds projects that address the five goals identified in the Commission's strategic plan:

1. Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.
2. Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.
3. Invest in critical infrastructure—especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.
4. Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.
5. Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

Each year, ARC provides funding for several hundred projects in the Appalachian Region in areas such as business development, education and job training, telecommunications, infrastructure, community development, housing, and transportation. These projects create thousands of new jobs; improve local water and sewer systems; increase school readiness; expand access to health care; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide technical and managerial assistance to emerging businesses.

Additional information about Appalachia and the Appalachian Regional Commission can be found at [www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov).

## **About POWER**

POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) is a congressionally funded initiative that targets federal resources to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production.

The POWER Initiative supports efforts to create a more vibrant economic future for coal-impacted communities by cultivating economic diversity, enhancing job training and re-employment opportunities, creating jobs in existing or new industries, and attracting new sources of investment.

To date, ARC has awarded approximately \$94 million through the POWER Initiative to help coal-impacted communities in 250 Appalachian counties diversify and grow their economies. These investments are projected to create or retain almost 8,800 jobs, leverage an additional \$210 million in investment, and prepare thousands of workers and students with globally competitive skills and opportunities in the Region's manufacturing, technology, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and other emerging sectors. For a list and description of grant investments funded through POWER see [www.arc.gov/power](http://www.arc.gov/power).

### **III. Scope of Work**

Proposals should present an outline of the monitoring and evaluation to be conducted, a work plan, and a schedule for reports and deliverables. This should include a list of key questions to be answered through this process that would be finalized with ARC staff and partners.

The monitoring and evaluation will begin with an examination of approximately 125 POWER grants funded since the inception of the POWER initiative in 2015. The majority of these 125 grants are still “open”, or under implementation, with closeout dates that range between 10/1/2018 and 9/30/2020. Approximately 15 of these grants have recently closed and have submitted final narrative reports. Keep in mind that additional grants funded in Fiscal Year 2018 may be included in this effort (estimate: 60 grants).

This effort will begin with a discussion about the POWER Initiative with key ARC program staff and a detailed review of POWER grant information in ARC’s internal grants management database (ARC.net) and in print files kept by the Commission to gain familiarity with project activities and performance outcomes. Then, in close consultation with ARC staff, selected contractor will develop and implement a data collection process appropriate for this effort. The purpose is to verify the achievement of grantees’ projected outputs and outcomes, highlight success stories, and assess the need for technical assistance for grantees facing unforeseen challenges.

In addition to assessing whether grantees are achieving their targets, the contractor should also assess the grantees’ internal systems for monitoring their own progress. Weaknesses in this area would warrant targeted technical assistance to help grantee set intermediate milestones that will enable them to achieve their final goals.

Suggested methodologies to obtain this information include:

- Monitoring of interim progress reports submitted by grantees,
- For the subset of grants (estimate 20) that are not required to submit interim reports, a new process to obtain performance data,
- Direct communication with POWER grantees (e.g., phone interviews, online questionnaires, and targeted onsite field visits to a subset of grants) to clarify and/or obtain grant-specific performance outputs and outcomes,
- Direct communication with relevant ARC program staff and state/local partners to clarify and/or obtain new information regarding the POWER grant,
- Other methodologies proposed by the contractor.

The data and information gathered through this process will be synthesized into one monthly report to ARC providing a snapshot of grantee performance during each period. Note that each monthly report to ARC will include information on only a subset of all POWER grants and not the entire portfolio. Each report should include a discussion of progress toward the established performance measures for all grants that, during that month, submitted interim or final reports, as well as those that have reached a determined post-closeout timeframe and were surveyed. For a small number of grants (approximately 20) that are not required to submit interim progress reports, contractor will work with ARC to develop an appropriate methodology to gather needed information.

These monthly reports submitted to ARC will track the progress of POWER grantees toward their economic development goals, highlight success stories, flag potential issues or challenges, and recommend technical assistance and training for grantees as needed, particularly with performance monitoring and evaluation. Contractors should also recommend ways to strengthen ARC's own evaluation efforts that can be applied broadly. We anticipate that selected contractor presenting this information in monthly conference calls with selected ARC staff and state partners.

Contractor is expected to participate in periodic POWER summits/workshops and Commission meetings as requested (estimate 5-6 events per year). POWER summits are biannual gatherings of POWER grantees to share project successes and challenges while POWER workshops inform potential new applicants about the POWER Initiative. These events are critical forums for summarizing findings, providing feedback and offering technical assistance to ARC, its state and local partners, and POWER grantees. While not required, contractor may recommend useful content for these critical settings.

Information gathered through this effort will inform ARC and its state and local partners on ways to better develop, assess, and manage POWER grants, and enhance the agency's ability for documenting and reporting program impacts for future use. Additionally, this process will help grantees strengthen their own ability to document and improve effectiveness, ultimately building capacity for critical economic development organizations throughout Appalachia.

Finally, contractors are required to submit all relevant databases and any supplemental information gathered for this research effort directly to ARC.

#### **IV. Methodology**

The successful applicant will develop a detailed methodology to analyze the topics specified in the Overview and Scope of Work.

The methodology should include a combination of the following tasks:

- Development of a framework for obtaining project-specific performance data on POWER grants, including:
  - Synthesizing information already provided via interim reports from POWER grants to determine progress toward stated performance goals,
  - Developing process for obtaining new data for a subset of grants that are not required to submit interim reports,
  - Calls with POWER grantees during implementation of their grant or immediately following submission of final report to verify and/or obtain project measurement,
  - Calls with ARC program staff and/or state and regional partners as needed to review outcomes from grantee reports, clarify information, obtain new data,
  - Follow-up calls, survey questionnaires, and targeted in-person field visits to monitor and verify results of longer-term performance measures and other project impacts. For budgeting purposes, contractors should estimate one field visit per month.
- Creation of a system to highlight success stories, flag potential issues or challenges, and recommend technical assistance and training as needed, particularly in the field of performance monitoring and evaluation
- Submission of updates to ARC in a monthly report, and
- Participation at periodic POWER workshops/summits and Commission meetings that provide an overview of results to date, review major themes, and makes strategic recommendations

Proposals can offer other methodological approaches as needed. The selected consultant will work closely with ARC in development of the methodology appropriate to complete the scope of work.

#### **V. Technical, Management, and Cost Proposal Contents**

- A. Technical Proposal (Narrative should not exceed 10 pages, not including the abstract and accompanying resumes and organizational background materials.)

1. Summary Abstract (300 words)

In this section, provide a brief abstract of the proposal by summarizing the background, objectives, proposed methodologies, and expected outputs and results of the monitoring and evaluation.

2. Methodology

Describe the step-by-step approach or methods intended to accomplish the tasks specified in this RFP. The proposal should provide a detailed explanation of the methodologies to be used, describe the limitations of the selected methods, and justify why the methods were selected over others. The proposal should identify the points and tasks that will require participation by ARC staff. Further, the statement should identify specific information needs according to sources, procedures, and individual tasks that may need to be supplied by the Commission. Finally, the proposal should identify any difficulties that may be encountered in the project and propose practical and sound solutions to these problems.

3. Project Work Plan and Milestones

The proposal should describe the phases into which the proposed monitoring and evaluation can be logically divided and performed. Flow charts should be included as necessary. A schedule of milestones and deadlines should be specified for the completion of various work elements, including information collection, interviews, surveys, analyses, and written monthly reports.

4. Key Personnel

Personnel performing the monitoring and evaluation must be described in this section in terms of numbers of people and their professional classification (e.g., project director, economist, analyst, business consultant, etc.). Brief resumes of the education and relevant experience of key personnel are required. The selected contractor will be required to furnish the services of those identified in the proposal as key personnel. Any change in key personnel is subject to approval by ARC.

## B. Management Proposal

The resource capability and program management for planning and performing the monitoring and evaluation will be considered in the proposal selection process.

1. Business Management Organization and Personnel

Furnish a brief narrative description of the organization, including the division or branch planned to perform the proposed effort, and the authority responsible for controlling these resources and personnel.

2. Staffing Plan

A staffing plan is required that describes the contractor's proposed staff distribution to accomplish this work. The staffing plan should present a chart that partitions the time commitment of each professional staff member to the project's tasks and schedule. In addition, the proposal should include a detailed description of activities for key project-related personnel and anticipated deliverables. Finally, the proposal should identify the relationship of key project personnel to the contracting organization, including consultants and subcontractors.

3. Relevant Prior Experience

The proposal must describe the qualifications and experience of the organization and the personnel to be assigned to the project. Information provided should include direct experience with the specific subject-matter area and must provide examples (via web links and/or printed materials) of the three most similar projects undertaken by the applicant's organization and the extent to which performance goals were stated and achieved. Provide associated organization names and addresses, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers for reference.

4. Contract Agreement Requirements

This section of the proposal should contain any special requirements that the contractor wants to have included in the contract.

### C. Cost Proposal

Each proposal submitted must contain all cost information. The cost information should include direct labor costs (consistent with the staffing plan), travel, lodging and transportation, estimated cost of any subcontracts, and other direct costs and overhead. Proposals must include hourly and daily rates for personnel directly involved with the contract.

An initial in-person kick-off/orientation meeting in Washington, D.C. is required. This is expected to be two to three days and will include discussion with key ARC staff involved in the POWER Initiative, instruction on ARC's grants management system (ARC.net) and access to in-house paper project files. Contractors may propose additional in-person meetings as necessary to complete the scope of work. Any proposed travel should be priced separately, including travel to

POWER summits/meetings, Commission meetings, and field visits with POWER grantees (estimate one per month).

## **VI. Cost and Timing**

The Commission rates this RFP as a project requiring a budget in the range of \$150K to \$200K over a period of twelve months.

The contract awarded for this effort will be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT, with payments on a quarterly schedule and processed only upon acceptance of satisfactory deliverables. The contract terms shall remain firm during the project and shall include all charges that may be incurred in fulfilling the terms of the contract. There is a possibility that this contract may be extended with additional funds.

## **VII. Copyrights**

The Federal Government, through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, for federal government purposes, any work developed under a contract, grant, subgrant, or contract under a grant or subgrant, and to use, and authorize others to use for federal government purposes, any copyrights which a grantee, a subgrantee or a contractor purchases with grant support or contract funds. Such license to use includes, but is not limited to, the publication of such work on an ARC Web site and social media. Use of such works for purposes related to Appalachia and the development of Appalachia is generally authorized by ARC to State and local governments in the ARC region and to other public and private not-for-profit organizations serving Appalachia, including the Appalachian Local Development Districts.

## **VIII. Evaluation of Proposals**

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Qualifications and relevant prior experience in program evaluation and performance measurement in an economic development context,
- Knowledge and demonstrated experience working in Appalachian communities, and/or economically distressed areas,
- Recommended methodologies for data collection and outreach to grantees, and milestones proposed.
- A credible management proposal for staffing, and the capability to carry out and support the project in a timely fashion,
- Ability to be flexible, timely and responsive, and
- Cost effectiveness of the proposal.

## **IX. Proposal Submission**

***Proposals are due on or before the close of business on June 28, 2018.***

An original and three hard copies of the proposal must be submitted to:

Kostas Skordas, Director  
Planning and Research Division  
Appalachian Regional Commission  
1666 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20009-1068

In addition to the hard-copy submission, ***proposals must also be e-mailed on or before the deadline*** to [kskordas@arc.gov](mailto:kskordas@arc.gov). E-mail attachments should be no more than 10 MB.

Questions about this proposal should be directed to Kostas Skordas, Director of Planning and Research, at [kskordas@arc.gov](mailto:kskordas@arc.gov) or at 202.884.7720.