



**APPALACHIAN  
REGIONAL  
COMMISSION**

Strategic Planning, Meeting Facilitation, and  
Strategic Plan Writing: Request for Proposals (RFP)

*September 10, 2019*

**The Appalachian Regional Commission Request for Proposals:**  
***Strategic Planning, Meeting Facilitation, and Strategic Plan Writing***

Open Date: September 10, 2019  
Proposal Due Date: October 15, 2019  
Selection Date: November 26, 2019  
Contract Period: December 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020

**I. Overview of Request for Proposals**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) seeks contractual support for a qualified team of strategic planners, meeting facilitators, and writers to assist the agency in development of its new strategic plan. The selected contractor will work closely with ARC to shape this effort over the course of a ten-month period beginning in December 2019 and concluding September 30, 2020.

As currently envisioned, the scope of work includes the following activities and deliverables:

- Work session with ARC staff and state representatives to shape the planning process, in Washington, D.C.;
- Meeting design and onsite facilitation for four community input sessions in the Appalachian Region (locations to be determined);
- Meeting design and onsite facilitation for one input session with members of Appalachia’s local development districts, in Arlington, VA;
- Meeting design and facilitation for up to eight focus group discussions with regional experts;
- Completion of several one-on-one interviews with regional experts
- Design and deployment of survey instrument for gathering online input from stakeholders
- Work session with ARC staff to synthesize major themes and critical issues identified through input sessions, in Washington, D.C.;
- One work session in Appalachia with ARC federal and state representatives to review draft agency vision, mission, strategic goals, objectives, and performance targets (location to be determined);
- One work session with ARC federal and state representatives to reach consensus on final strategic plan elements (to be conducted remotely); and
- Writing, editing, and layout of the strategic plan document.

Proposals must include a technical proposal, management proposal, and cost estimate for all work to be conducted. Cost estimates must include hourly and daily rates of all team members and estimated costs of travel for community input sessions and work sessions. It is anticipated that the strategic planning process will ultimately involve travel for up to sixteen meetings either in the Appalachian Region or in the Washington, D.C. area. Proposals should also factor in time for biweekly video conference calls with a steering committee throughout the process.

Proposals should not include a budget for logistical support for community input sessions or work sessions with ARC staff; travel support for community members and invited guests, audio-visual needs, meeting space rental, food and refreshments, printing of handouts, or mass printing and distribution of the strategic plan. It is anticipated that ARC and its local/state partners will provide logistical and administrative support for all events, including communications, registration (both advance and onsite), meeting space rental, food/refreshments, audio-visual needs, and printing costs.

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

## **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 16.3 percent over the 2013–2017 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 98 over the 2013–2017 period.

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 wastewater systems. The contrasts are not surprising in light of the Region's size and diversity—the Region 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)**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is an economic development agency of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 420 counties across the Appalachian Region. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, the Commission is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states, as well as a federal co-chair appointed by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The Commission is supported by agency staff and state representatives. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts.

ARC's current mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia to help the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation. 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 wastewater systems; increase school readiness; train the Region's workforce; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide entrepreneurial assistance to emerging businesses.

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

### **About the ARC's Strategic Plan Process**

ARC's current strategic plan expires in Fiscal Year 2020. Therefore, the Commission is undertaking the process of developing a new strategic plan to guide ARC activities and investments in Appalachia from Fiscal Year 2021 through Fiscal Year 2025. The Director of ARC's Research and Evaluation Division, guided by an internal steering committee, will oversee this effort with extensive participation by the ARC Federal Co-Chair, Commission members from the thirteen Appalachian states, ARC Executive Director and staff, members and staff of the Appalachian Region's Local Development Districts, and the general public. The final plan will be based on input and wisdom from a broad cross-section of critical stakeholders in Appalachia, including economic development practitioners and local entrepreneurs, funders and investors, local government professionals and civic leaders, educators and students, researchers, and the philanthropic and non-profit community. Contractors must also reference OMB Circular A-11 Part 6 for guidance on strategic planning for federal agencies including development of agency mission, long-term goals, strategies and approaches used to monitor progress.

ARC's current strategic plan, *Investing in Appalachia's Future, Appalachian Regional Commission Strategic Plan 2016-2020*, is available at <https://www.arc.gov/about/arc2016-2020strategicplan.asp>

The broad outlines of the strategic planning process have been approved by the Commission. The four phases of the process are outlined below.

***Phase I: Work Planning (December 2019 – February 2020):***

- ✓ Develop and finalize work plan
- ✓ Assess recent ARC investment trends
- ✓ Synthesize background research on Appalachia
- ✓ Scan and analyze existing ARC state strategic planning documents
- ✓ Finalize and announce locations and dates for four “community input sessions” throughout Appalachia to engage the general public on critical challenges and opportunities for economic development

ARC staff will play a critical role in this first phase by assessing recent ARC investment trends, scanning guidance documents, and synthesizing research for use in both input sessions and development of draft vision, mission, goals/objectives, and performance targets. Contractors are not expected to conduct extensive background research in this phase but rather provide guidance in what may be useful for strategic plan deliberation. In addition, ARC staff will work with its state and local partners to schedule dates and locations for four community input sessions, and plan ahead for other input sessions.

***Phase II: Listening and Input (March – May 2020)***

- ✓ Finalize and conduct four “community input sessions” throughout Appalachia
- ✓ Obtain online feedback from Appalachian residents and stakeholders via surveys or other means
- ✓ Gather input from Local Development District directors and staff at their annual conference (March)
- ✓ Integrate preexisting strategic documents into the process (including transportation, substance abuse recovery ecosystem and other relevant strategic guidance)
- ✓ Convene specialized focus groups and conduct interviews with regional experts

***Phase III: Synthesis and Options (May - June 2020)***

- ✓ Synthesize all stakeholder input
- ✓ Develop key themes and critical issues
- ✓ Continue focus group discussions and interviews with regional experts
- ✓ Consider options for strategic development (draft vision, mission, goals/objectives, targets)

***Phase IV: Consensus and Strategy (July – October 2020)***

- ✓ Develop consensus and finalize vision, mission, goals and objectives, and performance targets (target date: July 2020)
- ✓ Write plan, review draft documents, continue strategic discussions as needed
- ✓ Adopt strategic plan at ARC Commission Meeting (target date: September 2020)
- ✓ Submit to Office of Management and Budget
- ✓ Launch and operationalize plan

### III. Scope of Work

#### 1. Community Input Sessions

ARC plans to conduct several input sessions as part of its strategic plan process. The purpose of all input sessions is to help ARC develop a deeper understanding of the evolving opportunities and existing barriers to economic development in Appalachia, and offer community residents in Appalachia and ARC stakeholders the chance to participate in and contribute to ARC's strategic plan process.

Gathering input from community partners and stakeholders will take multiple forms:

*First*, ARC plans to hold four community input 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 anywhere from 100-150 individuals from a broad cross-section of the community engaged in each of these (half-day) discussions and should plan and budget accordingly. Contractors must submit a sample agenda for this session with clearly stated objectives and outcomes of the event as evidence of experience in group process and meeting facilitation.

*Second*, ARC plans to conduct an input (concurrent conference) session in Arlington, VA with members of Appalachia's 73 Local Development Districts (LDDs) to be held in March 2020. 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. We estimate 75-100 LDD staff will participate in this input session.

*Third*, ARC plans to use technology to facilitate public engagement in the strategic planning process and allow residents and stakeholders of Appalachia to participate in the process. Proposals should describe technologies such as online surveys that contractors will use for this purpose.

*Fourth*, ARC will supplement the input sessions with a series of up to eight focus groups designed to engage regionally-based practitioner experts on a specific topic. The purpose is to dig deeper into a given topic or strategy. The focus groups have not been determined yet. ARC will work with the selected contractor to identify the location, topic, and participants for each focus group. Additionally, contractors should consider conducting one-on-one interviews with regional experts to supplement knowledge of a particular topic or strategy relevant to economic development in Appalachia.

Contractors are expected to develop and finalize meeting agendas, facilitate on-site discussion, take notes, and synthesize findings of all input streams. Notes and background materials should be easily translated to strategic planning concepts and ideas to be used later in the process.

## ***2. Work Sessions with ARC***

The planning process will include four work sessions with ARC staff and federal and state stakeholders.

The first work session will be with an ARC steering committee (to include two or three state representatives) in Washington, D.C., early in the process to outline the process, develop and design the input sessions, schedule input session dates, and clarify roles, expectations, and communication flows. During this session, contractors should factor in time to interview ARC management for early input into the planning process.

The second work session will be with the ARC steering committee and selected state representatives, in Washington, D.C., to synthesize major themes and critical issues identified in the earlier input sessions and synthesize preexisting strategy documents into draft options for the strategic plan's mission, goals, objectives, and performance targets.

The third work session (in Appalachia) will be with leadership officials representing the ARC partnership (Federal Co-Chair and State Alternates) to review findings to date and discuss options for ARC's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and performance targets.

The final work session (to be held remotely) will be with leadership officials representing the ARC partnership to reach consensus on critical strategic plan elements.

Contractors are expected to develop work session meeting agendas, facilitate discussion, take notes, and synthesize findings of work sessions. Notes and background materials should be easily translated to strategic planning concepts and ideas that would be incorporated into the strategic plan document in the next phase.

## ***3. Writing and Layout of the Strategic Plan Document***

The final step in the process will include writing, editing, and preliminary layout of the strategic plan document, in close consultation with the ARC steering committee. Contractors should factor in three rounds of edits to the document based on comments from the committee. The document will be presented to the Commission for adoption in October 2020. After the strategic plan is formally adopted, ARC will submit it electronically to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

Note that contractors are not being asked for graphic design, branding, or mass distribution of the final strategic plan, which will occur after the document is finalized via a separate process. However, contractors may suggest graphic designers as an added work task.

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

### **A. Technical Proposal**

Narrative should not exceed 15 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 methodology, and expected outputs and results of this project.

**2. Methodology**

Describe the approach or methods intended to accomplish all the tasks specified in this RFP, making references to the phases and work tasks described in this document. Contractors are encouraged to suggest creative activities that supplement the tasks and add value to the existing process.

**3. Project Work Plan and Milestones**

The proposal should describe the phases into which the proposed work can be logically divided and performed, following closely the four phases outlined earlier. Flow charts should be included. A schedule of milestones and deadlines should be specified for the completion of various work elements, including work sessions, input sessions, survey, focus groups, interviews, analyses, written progress reports, preliminary drafts for review, and final draft plan. Monthly call-ins with ARC staff are also required.

**4. Key Personnel**

Personnel performing the work must be described in this section, including the number of people and their professional classifications (e.g., project director, meeting facilitator, analyst, business consultant, writer, 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 research 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 reference examples of similar strategic planning or economic development efforts undertaken by the applicant's organization and the extent to which performance goals were stated and achieved.

As evidence of relevant prior experience, contractors must include two writing samples appended as supplemental:

- a. Sample agenda for a community input session, including purpose, objective, activities, expected outcomes, and other information as relevant
- b. Sample strategic plan or related economic development document similar in scope and scale to the work requested

Contractors who do not submit writing samples as requested will not be considered for interviews. Contractors must also provide organization names and addresses, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers for reference. Up to three references are requested.

### ***4. Contract Agreement Requirements***

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

## **V. Cost Proposal**

The contract awarded for this project will be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT, with a total budget not to exceed **\$225,000**. Payments shall be made on a monthly schedule. 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.

Proposals must include an estimate for all work in the proposal, as well as hourly and daily rates of all relevant staff members; and must include estimated costs of travel to locations in the Appalachian Region and Washington, DC for input sessions, focus groups, and work sessions with ARC staff and representatives. We anticipate that the strategic planning process will include travel for up to sixteen meetings either in the Appalachian Region or in the Washington, D.C. area. Proposals should also factor in time for multiple video conference calls with the ARC Steering Committee throughout the process.

Proposals should not include a budget for logistical support for work sessions with ARC staff, community input sessions and focus group meetings, travel support for community members and invited guests, audio-visual needs, meeting space rental, food and refreshments, meeting handouts, mass printing and distribution of the strategic plan, and final plan graphic design and photography. It is anticipated that ARC and its local/state partners will provide logistical and administrative support for all events and work sessions, including communications and marketing of events, advance (online)

and onsite registration, meeting handouts, meeting space rental, food/refreshments and audio-visual needs.

Note that 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.

## **VI. Proposal Submission**

*Proposals are due on or before 5:00 pm EST on Tuesday, October 15, 2019.*

Please send proposals as one Word or PDF file to:

Kostas C. Skordas  
Director  
Division of Research and Evaluation  
Appalachian Regional Commission  
Washington, DC  
202-884-7720  
[kskordas@arc.gov](mailto:kskordas@arc.gov)

Additionally:

- Telephone or fax responses will not be accepted for this RFP;
- Submissions MUST be sent via email;
- Responses or unsolicited amendments will not be accepted after the closing date and time; and
- Requests for time extensions past any deadlines will not be considered.

## **VII. Proposal Evaluation**

ARC will select contractors through a competitive process based on the following criteria:

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

It is anticipated that the contractor will be selected by November 25, 2019 for estimated contract start date of December 1, 2019 and completion date of September 30, 2020.