

**Appalachian Regional Commission
Request for Proposals**

**Program Evaluation of ARC's Leadership and Community
Capacity Projects, FY 2008–FY 2015**

**Proposals due on or before the close of business
August 26, 2016**

Attention: Katie Whiteman
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**Appalachian Regional Commission Request for Proposals:
Program Evaluation of ARC's Leadership and Community Capacity
Projects, FY 2008–FY 2015**

I. Overview of Request for Proposals

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) invites proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to conduct a program evaluation of ARC-funded leadership and community capacity projects in the Appalachian Region. The evaluation will encompass approximately 135 projects funded from fiscal year 2008 through fiscal year 2015. ARC's leadership and community capacity projects include a wide range of project types, including adult and youth leadership programs, community and organizational capacity-building projects, downtown revitalization efforts, network and partnership-building projects, strategic planning for local communities, and technical assistance. Investments in these projects are targeted to meet the leadership or capacity-building needs of groups of individuals, organizations, and/or the community at large.

Given the diversity and range of project types, ARC's standard survey/case study methodology for program evaluation may not be sufficient for this report. (Please see [ARC's website](#) for recent program evaluations of telecommunications and technology, job creation and retention, health, infrastructure and public works, and education and workforce development projects). Therefore, this request for proposals seeks creative methodologies that use a holistic approach to program evaluation that includes both quantitative and qualitative components. Strategic recommendations on appropriate metrics and methodology for performance evaluation are also desired.

In evaluating leadership and community capacity projects, it is important to understand assumptions about the nature of the issues and the proposed solutions underlying community strategies for interventions. For this reason, evaluation will likely require a combination of in-depth, detailed case study analysis coupled with other methods, such as focus groups, structured interviews with participants and other community stakeholders, and innovative survey methods. ARC is open to alternative approaches and methodologies that can meet the dual objectives of producing an initial assessment of the results of this program and providing a framework for measurement and evaluation moving forward.

The evaluation will involve a detailed review of information in ARC's internal grants management database (ARC.net) and in print documents archived by the Commission. This information will be augmented by information gathered through a data collection process proposed by the contractor. It is expected that this process will include communication with ARC project grantees (e.g., phone interviews, site visits, or online questionnaires) to obtain project-specific outputs and outcomes. The data and information gathered in this process will be analyzed and presented in a draft as well as a final report.

The Commission's purpose in conducting this evaluation is to determine the extent to which leadership and community capacity projects have succeeded in attaining the projects' objectives.

In addition, recognizing that its current system of measuring outputs and outcomes for these projects may be too general, the Commission seeks to improve its performance measurements for monitoring and evaluating leadership and community capacity projects. A large body of research on methods and approaches for evaluating community-based leadership and capacity-building initiatives has been developed, and the Commission would like to situate the analysis of this evaluation within the current state of knowledge about best practices, based on national studies of similar types of projects.

Information from the evaluation report will inform ARC on ways to better develop, assess, and manage leadership and community-capacity projects, and enhance the agency's ability to document and report program impacts. Contractors should reference [ARC's 2004 report evaluating leadership and community capacity projects](#) and use it to inform their proposals.

Relevant questions for this evaluation, and the case studies specifically, include:

- What problems and challenges were the projects designed to address?
- What approaches did the projects use to ameliorate these problems and challenges?
- What specific outcomes were projects designed to achieve and did they meet their performance targets?
- What are the characteristics of communities, individuals, and organizations that benefited from the projects?
- To what extent were project-related gains sustained beyond the period covered by the ARC grant?
- What factors influenced a project's success and implementation?
- Have grantees applied lessons learned to their ensuing efforts to serve target communities?
- What strategic, actionable recommendations can be made for both ARC and the local communities undertaking these types of projects?

The final product will be a detailed written report and an executive summary. Both must be submitted to ARC within 12 months of the project's start. Although some components of the report will be inherently technical in nature, the final report should be written for a non-technical audience, with the narrative discussion weaving together statistics, analyses, graphs, maps, and tables where appropriate. The selected consultant will work closely with ARC in development of this report. Creative approaches for content and presentation are encouraged.

Both a printed copy of the final report, suitable for reproduction, and two electronic versions—a Microsoft Word file and an Adobe PDF file—must be submitted on completion of the project. A software version of all relevant databases compiled during

the study, including all raw data, edited datasets, and results of statistical analyses, must also be submitted at this time.

Please note that this evaluation must comply with program evaluation requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (*GPRA*). See the following resources:

[Government Performance and Results Act Related Materials](#)
[OMB Circular A-11](#)

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 Region's economy, once highly dependent on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry, has become more diversified in recent times, and now includes a variety of manufacturing and service industries. In 1965, one in three Appalachian residents lived in poverty; during the 2010-2014 period, the Region's poverty rate was around 17 percent. Approximately 70 percent of Appalachian counties (295 of 420) were considered high poverty in 1960 (at least one and a half times the U.S. average); during the 2010–2014 period, that number went down to 91.

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 adequate 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 and a federal co-chair, who is 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.

III. Scope of Work

Proposals should present an outline of the research and analysis to be conducted, a work plan, and a schedule for reports and deliverables. The scope of work requires a team of researchers and consultants with a broad set of skills to execute the project.

The program evaluation will begin with an examination of a sample of closed projects selected from the approximately 135 leadership and community capacity projects that were funded from fiscal year 2008 through fiscal year 2015 and have since been completed. These projects can be divided roughly into two general categories including:

- Leadership projects. These projects build skills and support the development of existing and emerging leaders through seminars, workshops, and other local community-based projects. The purpose of these projects is to develop and support robust, inclusive leadership that can champion and mobilize forward-thinking community improvement and economic development.

- Community-capacity projects. These projects strengthen the abilities of individuals, organizations, and communities to manage their own affairs and to work together to foster and sustain positive change. Projects in this category support visioning, strategic planning and implementation, and resident-engagement approaches that foster increased community reliance and generate positive economic impacts. They also foster robust networks and partnership that catalyze action for community impact and economic growth.

The sample projects will be chosen in consultation with the ARC staff, and will be based on a thorough review of approximately 135 completed projects representative of the range of leadership and community capacity projects funded by ARC during the FY 2008-FY 2015 period. The preliminary sample should provide adequate coverage by both state and economic status of the counties, although it is recognized that this will not necessarily be a random sample, given the stratification of such a small universe. Overall, however, the program-level evaluation will seek to verify the achievement of the grantees' projected outcomes and assess the utility and validity of the various performance measurements used for monitoring and evaluating these types of projects.

The report should include a discussion of the performance measurement and policy issues raised by the analysis, such as:

- Selection of output and outcome measures
- Identification of model programs and best practices
- Significant obstacles to successful program development and implementation
- Need for operational follow-up and support
- Project sustainability

IV. Methodology

The successful applicant will develop a detailed methodology to analyze the topics specified in the scope of work.

The methodology should include:

- Specification of criteria for the selection of the sample projects
- Development of a framework for assessing performance measurement of outputs and outcomes
- A review of the literature and current state of knowledge about best practices for each project type, based on national studies of similar types of projects
- Development of methodologies for selecting case studies
- Proposal of other methods of evaluation, including focus groups, surveys, and other approaches
- Methods for compiling data and presentation of results

Proposals can offer other methodological approaches as needed. In keeping with the overall budget constraint and timing for this project, proposals may present trade-offs

among tasks as long as the research design can ensure the accomplishment of the main research objectives of the project within the given time period. The selected consultant will work closely with ARC in development of this report.

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 research.

2. Methodology

The proposal should provide a detailed explanation of the methodologies to be used, describe the limits of the selected methods, and justify why the methods were selected over others. The proposal should identify the points and tasks in this research project that will require participation by Commission staff. Further, the proposal should identify specific information needs according to sources, procedures, and individual research tasks that may need to be performed by Commission staff. Finally, the proposal should identify any difficulties that may be encountered in this 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 research 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, written quarterly progress reports, preliminary drafts for review, and final draft reports. Monthly call-ins with ARC staff are also required.

4. Key Personnel

Personnel performing the research must be described in this section, including the number of people and their professional classifications (e.g., project director, economist, analyst, business consultant, etc.). Brief resumes of the education and relevant experience of the principal investigator, co-investigator, and other 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 that describes the contractor's proposed staff distribution to accomplish this work is required. 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 research reports undertaken by the applicant's organization and the extent to which performance goals were stated and achieved. Provide 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 included in the contract.

C. Cost Proposal

Proposals must contain all cost information, including direct labor costs (consistent with the staffing plan), labor overhead costs, transportation, estimated cost of any subcontracts, other direct costs (such as those for databases), university overhead, total direct cost and overhead, and total cost and fee or profit.

ARC requests that the selected contractor formally present and discuss study findings with key Appalachian officials in Washington, D.C. An initial kick-off meeting in Washington, D.C., is also required. These activities will be over and above routine meetings with ARC staff during the course of the project, and the contractor should price its part in this activity separately, assuming travel to two one-day meetings.

VI. Cost and Timing

The Commission rates this RFP as a medium-scale research project according to ARC's rating of the level of effort for conducting research: major research projects, \$250k-\$300k; large-scale projects, \$150 to \$249k; medium-scale projects, \$75k to \$149K; small-scale projects, \$26k to \$74k.

The contract awarded for this research project will be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT, with payments on a quarterly 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.

VII. Copyrights

The federal government, through the Appalachian Regional Commission, 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 Appalachian 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:

- A complete, clearly articulated, logical study design and technically competent methodology;
- Qualifications, relevant prior experience, knowledge of leadership and community capacity programs, and ability to present findings in a useful manner;
- A credible management proposal for staffing, and the capability to carry out and support the project in a timely fashion;
- The quality of interviews, focus group, surveys and/or case study protocols proposed; and
- Cost effectiveness of the proposal.

IX. Proposal Submission

Proposals are due on or before the close of business on August 26, 2016.

An original and three hard copies of the proposal must be submitted to:
Katie Whiteman, Regional Planner
Regional 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 kwhiteman@arc.gov. E-mail attachments should be no more than 10 MB.

Questions about this proposal should be directed to Katie Whiteman, Regional Planner at kwhiteman@arc.gov or at 202.884.7756.