

**Appalachian Regional Commission
Request for Proposals**

**Program Evaluation of the Appalachian Regional Commission's
Telecommunications and Technology Projects, 2004–2010**

**Proposals are due by close of business on
August 21, 2014**

Appalachian Regional Commission
1666 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20009-1068

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Appalachian Regional Commission Request for Proposals: Program Evaluation of the Appalachian Regional Commission's Telecommunications and Technology Projects, 2004–2010

I. Overview of Request for Proposals

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) invites proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to conduct a large-scale program evaluation of ARC-funded telecommunications and technology projects in the Appalachian Region. The evaluation will encompass approximately 330 projects funded from fiscal year 2004 through fiscal year 2010. ARC's telecommunications and technology projects assist with a variety of activities, including distance learning applications for rural school systems, advanced telemedicine applications for rural health clinics, high-speed internet access for business applications, and access to curricula for workforce training programs.

The main purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Determine the extent to which these projects have succeeded in achieving ARC's strategic goals;
- Inform ARC of ways to better develop, assess, and manage future telecommunications and technology projects; and
- Enhance ARC's capability for documenting and reporting program impacts within a complex and evolving telecommunications landscape.

The evaluation should also:

- Examine ARC's role in the current and changing landscape of the telecommunications industry and impending changes that will impact economic development in Appalachia;
- Analyze current issues, challenges, and opportunities in the telecommunications industry and present policy implications raised by this analysis; and
- Present recommendations for best-practice strategies and critical success factors necessary for expanding broadband access in the Appalachian Region.

In addition, the evaluation should comply with program evaluation requirements under the [Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 \(GPRA\)](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/mgmt-gpra/index-gpra) (www.whitehouse.gov/omb/mgmt-gpra/index-gpra), and [OMB Circular A-11](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a11_current_year_a11_toc) (www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a11_current_year_a11_toc).

The evaluation will involve a detailed review of information recorded in ARC's internal grants management database (ARC.net) and, where necessary, hard-copy 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 will include a survey of 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 and final report, along with approximately 15 in-depth case studies of telecommunications and technology projects.

Information from the evaluation report will inform ARC on ways to better develop, assess, and manage telecommunications and technology projects and investments, and to enhance the agency's capability for documenting and reporting program impacts.

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 businesses that benefited from the projects?
- Looking specifically at projects providing broadband access, what strategies could be replicated or scaled up? Are there other potential strategies?
- To what extent were project-related gains sustained beyond the period covered by the ARC grant?
- What factors influenced the project's success and implementation?
- Have grantees applied lessons learned to their ensuing efforts to serve target communities?

The final product will be a detailed written report submitted to ARC within one year of project start. Although the subject matter is highly technical, the report should be written for a non-technical audience, and should include descriptive statistics, analyses, graphs, maps, and tables where appropriate. The contractor will work closely with ARC in the development of this report.

II. Background

About ARC Program Evaluations

To comply with the federal government's emphasis on performance-based management, ARC conducts regularly scheduled independent evaluations of all its major program areas. GPRA requires each agency's strategic plan to describe the relationship between its general goals and objectives and the performance goals reported in its annual performance plan. Evaluations confirm both the outcomes and the overall effectiveness of projects. They focus on the extent to which the projects have achieved, or contributed to the attainment of, their objectives. Particular emphasis is placed on assessing the utility and validity of the outcome measures. The findings of these project evaluations are summarized and made available to state and local organizations engaged in carrying out ARC projects, and are typically published on ARC's Web site.

Recently published evaluations include:

- [*Program Evaluation of the Appalachian Regional Commission's Infrastructure and Public Works Projects*](http://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=105), September 2013
(www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=105)
- [*Program Evaluation of ARC's Education and Workforce Development Projects: 2000-2008*](http://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=102), December 2012
(www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=102)

- [Program Evaluation of ARC's Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Natural Asset-Related Projects](#), September 2010
(www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=90)

About ARC Telecommunications and Technology Projects

The ARC strategic plan lays out an objective to “increase access to and use of telecommunications technology” to support economic development. Many communities across Appalachia, especially those that are rural and/or economically distressed, are not equipped with up-to-date telecommunications technologies, including high-speed broadband. This seriously limits the potential for economic development in the areas that need it the most. In addition, the landscape of the telecommunications industry is swiftly changing. These changes include:

- Significant changes in the subsidy systems (Universal Service Support and Intercarrier Compensation) historically used to support rural networks;
- A move to gigabit broadband networks in larger cities;
- Changes in the federal E-rate program, which supports internet access in schools and libraries; and
- A move away from wired telephone and internet service to wireless services in rural areas.

Such changes could create a new set of issues and challenges for communities throughout the Region, and ARC must keep abreast of these issues in determining the direction for its telecommunications program in the future. Addressing new issues and challenges in telecommunications and technology and recommending new directions for ARC's telecommunications program are important components of this evaluation.

Currently, ARC's telecommunications and technology projects generally fall into three categories:

1. *Telecommunications and Broadband*. This category includes a variety of equipment and technology for communities (including government, non-profits, community access points, etc.) with a special emphasis on broadband support to both underserved and unserved areas. This can include deploying wireless broadband systems, running fiber for broadband connectivity and providing additional technology (computers/routers/storage) for local municipalities.
2. *Telecommunications and Technology for Schools*. This category includes a variety of equipment and technology used to promote education and distance learning. This can include new computers for computer labs or classroom placement, whiteboards, projectors, smartboards, Wi-Fi installations, and distance learning equipment, including cameras and microphones. ARC has also supported many initiatives where students were assigned a laptop for use at school and at home.
3. *Telemedicine/Health Technology*. This category includes a variety of equipment and systems used to promote rural health care. This can include assistance to Electronic Medical Records (EMR) systems, Health Information Exchange (HIE) systems, and digital testing equipment that contains the ability to transfer digital test results to remote locations.

In general, ARC measures and reports telecommunications and technology performance goals in terms of both outputs and outcomes. Outputs are measures documenting the scope of the project, such as the number of participants, patients, students, businesses, or communities served by the project. Outcome measures include the long-term improvements in participants, patients, students, businesses or communities as a result of program intervention, as well as the number of “telecom sites” established and any jobs created or retained as a result of the project. Given the range of telecommunications and technology projects funded by ARC, contractors may propose a more comprehensive and systematic method to measure the outputs and outcomes produced.

For additional information on ARC’s telecommunications program, please see www.arc.gov/telecom.

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 manufacturing and service industries. In 1960, about 31 percent of Appalachians lived in poverty; over the 2008–2012 period, 16.6 percent lived in poverty. The number of high-poverty counties in Appalachia (counties with poverty rates at least 1.5 times the U.S. average) declined from 295 in 1960 to 107 in 2012.

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 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

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 is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established 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 be a strategic partner and advocate for sustainable community and economic development in Appalachia. ARC funds projects that address the four goals identified in the Commission’s strategic plan:

1. Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
2. Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
3. Develop and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.
4. Build the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia's isolation.

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.

In many cases, the Commission functions as a predevelopment agency, providing modest initial funding that is unavailable from other sources. ARC funds attract capital from the private sector and from other public entities. In fiscal year 2013, approximately 400 non-highway projects were approved; ARC funds accounted for \$61 million of the more than \$190 million in total funding for these projects.

For additional information on Appalachia and the Appalachian Regional Commission, see [ARC's Web site](http://www.arc.gov) (www.arc.gov).

III. Scope of Work

Proposals must 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 will require a team of researchers and consultants with a broad set of skills to execute the project.

The following should be addressed in the design of proposals for this research project.

1. Literature Review

Conduct a literature review to determine the current landscape of the telecommunications industry and impending changes that will impact economic development in Appalachia. The review should include two reports developed a decade ago, which ARC has based much of its telecommunications and technology work on:

[*Links to the Future: The Role of Information and Telecommunications Technology in Appalachian Economic Development*](#), June 2002

(www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=47), and

[*Update to Links to the Future*](#), June 2004

(www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/2004UpdateLinkstoFutureRoleofInformationandTelecommunicationsTechnology1.pdf);

as well as the [National Broadband Map](http://www.broadbandmap.gov) (www.broadbandmap.gov), the [Federal Communication Commission's](#) broadband progress reports (www.fcc.gov), and any other relevant documents.

2. Methodology

Develop research methodology to collect performance data on ARC telecommunications and technology projects. This detailed methodology should be informed by and include a careful review of:

- Relevant ARC evaluation research reports (available at www.arc.gov/research);
- Other program evaluation, performance measurement, and reporting methods used for telecommunications and technology and other government programs.

It should include relevant and significant references to methods and preferred approaches for collecting survey data on evaluations of telecommunications and technology projects.

Contractor should ensure methodology is consistent with the GPRA, *OMB Circular A-11*, and recent ARC program evaluations.

3. Data Collection

Develop and implement a data collection method (survey/questionnaire) to obtain updated, accurate project performance data for ARC telecommunications and technology projects. The project impact data collection task will focus on roughly 330 projects that were funded by ARC from FY 2004 through FY 2010. The successful proposal must develop methods to obtain sufficient responses to ensure a valid, robust evaluation. The goal is to provide complete and accurate performance data for as many telecommunications and technology projects as possible, supplementing the data in ARC's database of projects (to be provided to contractor).

4. Data Analysis

Analyze and summarize the data obtained through the survey/questionnaire. Assess the utility and validity of ARC's performance measures for monitoring and evaluating telecommunications and technology projects. The analysis should be organized around direct project outputs (e.g., students, businesses and communities served) and outcomes (e.g., new telecom sites, jobs created or retained, students, businesses and communities improved). Contractor may propose other performance measures to evaluate a project's success in reaching intended goals.

5. Data Presentation

Prepare a database containing project information and key performance data. Provide metadata (field name description, definition, source, source date, and equation if computed) for all raw and computed data fields. The database should include a series of tabulations, queries, graphs, etc. that summarize the research project's findings.

6. Case Studies

Conduct approximately 15 in-depth case studies of telecommunications and technology projects. The case studies must include at least ten ARC-funded projects, which should cover a representative range of project categories. Identify innovative or promising programs that are addressing critical telecommunications and technology needs, and describe how barriers and challenges were overcome. Specific attention should be given to best practices for rural, underserved, and/or economically distressed communities. The purpose of the case studies is to highlight telecommunications and technology projects in the Appalachian Region.

Proposals should describe the kind of information that will be obtained through these case studies, methods to engage stakeholders (e.g., in-person, via phone), and how the information collected in these detailed case studies can inform and provide greater context for the overall evaluation.

7. *Policy Implications and Strategic Recommendations*

Discuss policy implications raised by the literature review, the analysis of ARC projects, and the development of case studies. Analyze current issues, challenges, and opportunities in the telecommunications industry and offer strategic recommendations for best-practice strategies and critical success factors necessary for expanding broadband access in the Appalachian Region.

IV. Deliverables

The contract will require three quarterly progress reports, a draft evaluation report, and a final evaluation report. The final report must include an executive summary that integrates, summarizes, and interprets key findings of the study. The final report must be written for a non-technical audience and must include descriptive statistics, analyses, graphs, maps, and tables where appropriate. Technical details, data tables, and details regarding methodology must be presented in appendices.

Contractor must submit one printed copy of the report and two electronic versions: a Microsoft Word file and an Adobe PDF file. Contractor must also submit a Microsoft Excel workbook or a Microsoft Access database containing all relevant data compiled during the study. Contractor will provide metadata (field name description, definition, source, sourced date, and equation if computed) for all raw and computed data fields. If geographic information system maps are developed for the project, contractor must provide map databases, map images, and map documents. ARC will provide contractor with formatting guidance documents for all reports.

V. 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 data sets and methods to be used for each of the proposed analyses, including development of surveys/data collection methods and other sources of information.
- Discussion of the scope, advantages, and limitations of these resources for the purposes of this analysis, including issues related to data aggregation and geographical coverage.
- Specification of the analytical framework, research methods, and statistical techniques to be used for the proposed analysis. Proposals should discuss the relative merits of various approaches, and outline the advantages and limitations of the selected approach.
- Method for summarizing results by state and ARC subregion.
- Specification of the decision process and protocols to be used for selecting and conducting case studies of meaningful telecommunications and technology projects and best practices that address research questions and issues.

Proposals may offer additional research and policy items to be considered above and beyond the scope of the current evaluation to inform ARC's strategic thinking on telecommunications.

VI. Technical, Management, and Cost Proposals

A. Technical Proposal (*Narrative should be 10 pages or less, **not including** the abstract, resumes, and organizational background materials.*)

1. *Summary Abstract (300 words)*

Provide a brief abstract of the technical portion of the proposal by summarizing the background, objectives, proposed methodology, and expected outputs and results of the research.

2. *Methodology*

Describe the step-by-step approach or methods intended to accomplish all tasks specified in this RFP. This section should provide a detailed explanation of the methodologies to be used, describe the limits of the selected methods, and justify the selection of these methods over others. The narrative must identify the tasks in this research project that will require participation by ARC staff. Finally, the narrative must 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*

Describe the phases into which the proposed research can logically be divided and completed. Flow charts should be included as necessary. A schedule of milestones and deadlines must be specified for the completion of various work elements, including information collection, interviews, surveys, analyses, quarterly progress reports, preliminary drafts for review, and final draft reports.

4. *Key Personnel*

Describe personnel performing the research in terms of numbers of people and their professional classifications (e.g., project director, economist, analyst, statistician). 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 unless ARC authorizes a change in personnel.

B. Management Proposal

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*

Provide a staffing plan that describes your 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 your organization, including consultants and subcontractors.

3. *Relevant Prior Experience*

Describe the qualifications and experience of the organization and the personnel that will be assigned to the project. Include direct experience with the specific subject-matter area and provide examples (via web links and/or printed materials) of the three most-similar research reports your organization has produced. Provide associated organization names, addresses, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers for reference.

4. *Contract Agreement Requirements*

List any special requirements you want included in the contract.

C. Cost Proposal

This section must include all cost information. Cost information must be itemized and must include direct labor costs (consistent with the staffing plan), labor overhead costs, transportation, the 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. Please note that the university overhead rate charged to ARC should not exceed the rate charged to the university's home state.

In addition, ARC requires that the selected contractor travel to two meetings in Washington, D.C.—one meeting with ARC staff to kick off the project, and one formal presentation and discussion of key findings with ARC officials at the conclusion of the project.

VII. Cost and Timing

ARC rates this RFP as a **large-scale project**, according to the Commission's rating of the level of effort for conducting research:

Major research projects: \$250,000-\$300,000

Large-scale projects: \$150,000-\$249,000

Medium-scale projects: \$75,000-\$149,000

Small-scale projects: \$26,000-\$74,000

Sole-source projects: under \$25,000

The contract awarded for this research project will be a **FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT**, with payments on a quarterly schedule. The contract scope of work and budget shall remain firm during the project.

VIII. Evaluation of Proposals

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Complete, clearly articulated, and logical study design;
- Technically competent methodology;
- Qualifications, relevant prior experience, command of existing research on telecommunications and technology issues, 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 groups, surveys, and/or case study protocols proposed.
- The cost-effectiveness of the proposal.

IX. Proposal Submission

Proposals are due by close of business on Thursday, August 21, 2014.

An original and three hard copies of the proposal must be submitted to:
Kathryn 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 Kathryn Whiteman, Regional Planner, at kwhiteman@arc.gov, or 202-884-7756.