



Appalachian
Regional
Commission

Request for Proposals (RFP) for Completion of the Online System for Conveying Applications to Reviewers (OSCAR)

Open Date:	12/4/2020
Proposal Due Date:	1/29/2021
Selection Date:	Mid-February 2021
Contract Period:	9-12 months from contract signing

Submit any questions concerning this RFP to Marc Hutzell at mhutzell@arc.gov before January 29th, 2021.

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Background

Overview of the Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is an economic development partnership agency of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 420 counties across the Appalachian Region (the Region). Established by an act of Congress in 1965 through the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA) 40 U.S. Code §14101–14704, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chairperson, who is appointed by the president of the United States. Local participation is also provided through multi-county local development districts (LDDs).

ARC serves a 205,000-square-mile region of 25 million people that includes all of West Virginia and parts of twelve other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia. Additional information about Appalachia and the Appalachian Regional Commission can be found at www.arc.gov.

Overview of ARC's Grant Application System

The Appalachian Regional Commission, located in Washington, D.C., is seeking proposals from qualified developers and/or companies to complete the development of our online grant application platform, OSCAR (Online System for Conveying Applications to Reviewers).

ARC offers several different types of grants. While the focus of OSCAR is on ARC's area development grants, OSCAR needs to be developed with an understanding that other grant types may be added later.

As a platform, OSCAR must be adaptable to support the submission, review, and revision of ARC area development grant applications that originate with ARC's state partners. The focus of this request for proposals (RFP) is developing, completing, and implementing the platform to effectively accommodate ARC's area development applications, whether for grants that ARC manages or for a federal or state "basic agency" that manages grants on ARC's behalf.

All requirements for the completion of OSCAR have been compiled, and the business processes and roles have been clearly defined by ARC. These requirements are located at <https://bit.ly/3652FBJ>

Overview of Request for Proposals

OSCAR is an online grant application platform that utilizes React on the front-end to access a .NET Core Web API on the back end and is hosted in ARC's Azure tenant. All application information gathered via OSCAR will then be transferred to a .NET Web forms-based internal grant management system (ARCnet) located on local ARC servers. Along with the information found in this RFP, ARC will provide the application workflow process and the consolidated list of requirements. ARC will also show the database schema during the demo period.

Proposals for the completion of OSCAR must include the work breakdown based on ARC's grant application workflow process and consolidated requirements, as well as on staff and user interviews as needed. The proposal should reflect ARC's implementation schedule for a soft launch utilizing one state for a real-world production test in the summer of 2021. A fully web-based grant application system is expected to be ready by first quarter of federal fiscal year 2022 for all states.

Scope of Work and Deliverables

The Appalachian Regional Commission is seeking proposals to complete the design and development of its existing custom hybrid system to a fully web-based grants application system. The scope of work is based on the grant workflow application process, consolidated requirements; this information is included as an attachment to this RFP. The goal of this project is to provide ARC with a hassle-free, entirely online grants application system that provides for different workflows and includes multiple state partners.

Substantial development groundwork has been laid for OSCAR up to this point. An initial user interface (UI) has been created, utilizing React as the main UI library along with several others (e.g., Redux). A beginning Web API design has also been established utilizing .NET Core with Entity Framework to access an SQL Server database. Finally, a number of screens have been wired to save data through the Web API to the database and retrieve it back to the UI, all of which are hosted in ARC's Azure tenant. The following additional work needs to be completed to make OSCAR fully operational :

1. Ability to enter, maintain, retrieve, and edit data on the platform.
2. User roles need to be created for the grant applicants, states, and ARC, and implemented per the workflow requirements.
3. Workflow must be fully implemented, including the ability to return, edit, or withdraw an application.
4. Administrator functionality, including the optional ability to transfer partially completed applications to ARCnet.
5. Business process, business, and validation rules need to be implemented.
6. Transfer process from OSCAR to ARCnet, including creating a project number and manually assigning an ARC coordinator as part of the transfer process.
7. Incorporation of instructions, info help text, and other user aids.
8. Modifications of the UI as necessary to include changes per ARC's brand guide as needed.
9. Technical implementation changes, such as use of data transfer objects (DTOs), database default values, additional indexes, triggers to populate the audit tables, security measures, etc.

The selected contractor must appoint a project manager (PM) who will serve as the point of contact (POC) and provide supervision and guidance for all contract personnel assigned to this contract. To be clear, the project manager is not the same role as a business manager. The PM is responsible for the quality and efficiency of contractor performance to support and gather the requirements. The PM will also coordinate the tasking of contract personnel, track and report on the status of the task list, supervise ongoing technical efforts, and manage overall contract performance.

ARC also requires that the contractor provide a task-tracking document or system that clearly defines the tasks associated with the project, the priority level, the progress, and the person responsible for the task.

The Appalachian Regional Commission's director of information technology will provide overall direction and management of the scope of work and deliverables. ARC will also provide a programmatic staff person to act as a task tracker. This role will assist in making sure we stay on track with our tasks and act as a liaison between IT, the contractor, and programmatic staff. During the scope of the project, the contractor will also be required to attend ARC's weekly working group meetings and hold smaller breakout meetings as required. Monthly status update meetings for division directors will also be required.

There are four project areas into which the remaining work can be categorized:

- Application submission
- State review of applications
- Transfer from OSCAR to ARCnet process
- Software rollout process

Application Submission

About ARC's Grant Application Process

Each year, ARC receives and reviews over 600 project applications during the fiscal year, which runs from October 1 through September 30 according to the federal fiscal year calendar; the majority of ARC area development grant proposals are received between July 1 and September 30.

The applicant seeking area development funding from ARC must initially apply at the state level and go through a pre-approval process. The state program managers then ask the applicants to submit all required information for internal state review. The states review the full applications based on completeness, accuracy, and alignment with their mission. The full applications include items such as the SF-424 (application for federal assistance), budgets, project narratives, support letters, engineering reports, and other documents.

Those projects that meet state and federal strategic goals receive approval to move forward from the state's governor (or designee), and then the projects are submitted to ARC for final approval and funding. Most projects are applications for area development grants, both construction and non-construction. Currently, these applications are hard-copy packages that are emailed to ARC in portable document format (PDF). A project is manually created in ARCnet by an ARC project staff person, and the hard-copy package is uploaded to the newly created project. Once entered in ARCnet, the projects are automatically assigned a project number (consecutively) and assigned to an ARC staff member (grant coordinator) to review the project to ensure it meets ARC's strategic goals and objectives, federal guidelines for funding, matching sources of funds, and viability. Those projects that meet the requirements and are reviewed by the grant coordinator are then forwarded to the division director, then to the executive director, and finally to the federal co-chair (and in a very limited number of situations, the state co-chair, i.e., a state governor) for approval. Grantees for approved projects receive electronic notification and can sign grant agreements electronically to finalize their funding. Post-award activities then commence.

ARC approves two basic types of grants: construction and non-construction:

- Construction grants are managed by a designated basic agency, which can be a federal agency or a state agency. When a state agency acts as the basic agency (state administered), the grant agreement, amendments, and transactions are processed by ARC staff through ARCnet. A federal basic agency designation means that the federal agency performs all these tasks and provides monthly financial reporting that is manually input into ARCnet.
- Non-construction grants are managed by ARC staff.

Current State

After going through each state's pre-approval process, potential grantees download and fill out the required applications and forms. At that point, applicants submit their information via email to the appropriate state representative for review.

Deliverable

To complete design and deployment of a functional fully web-based application process, the application would be accessed by the applicant to fill out information and upload required documents. (See the "OSCAR 14 File Upload" document in the consolidated requirements documents). The web-based application will also be accessible to the program office in the state where the grantee project shall be executed for review and preliminary approval.

State Review of Applications

Current State

After applicants submit their applications via email to the appropriate state contact, the state then conducts their own internal process for review and selects the applications to be forwarded to ARC; ARC then conducts a cursory review before the application is entered into ARCnet and assigned to a project coordinator for full examination. The state review process falls in line with ARC's project checklist and adherence to ARC's code.

Deliverable

States need the ability to allow the application to be reviewed by multiple staff members on their team during the review process. They also need to be able to create comments and questions that the applicants can respond to in the application. The comments need to be saved for record-keeping purposes and viewable via PDF by the states and ARC staff.

Transfer from OSCAR to ARCnet Process

Deliverable

The ability to smoothly transfer data from the application in the OSCAR system to ARCnet. The transfer process consists of the following:

- Creating a new project in ARCnet, to include assigning a coordinator and project number(s) to the application. For completely new projects, the project number would be formatted as state_id-XXXXX, where X is the next available sequential number, plus any suffix. For continuation and/or revision applications, the assigned project number would be based on the previous underlying project number. (How/when it is determined whether the grant is an "R," "C," or a new number)
- Assigning the application data to the appropriate ARCnet fields for the newly created project. Note that some of the data collected during the application phase does not have a corresponding field in ARCnet. This will require the modification of existing tables and/or creation of additional SQL tables, as well as changes to the UI to display that information in coordination with the ARC Applications Developer.
- Assigning the selected counties to their congressional districts.
- Uploading the comments to ARCnet either as a table or as a PDF.
- Attaching the documents uploaded during the application phase to the files tab in ARCnet.
- Any additional actions necessary to successfully effect the transfer process.

Software Rollout

Deliverable

After successful internal testing and training, ARC intends to utilize one state in the Region to act as tester for a soft launch of OSCAR. The soft launch will be a real-world, production-level test of the entire grant application process in OSCAR. The contractor will be required to assist in coordinating efforts and resolving issues that may arise with ARC and the one state who will act as a tester. ARC also requests support to implement OSCAR across the remaining 13 states using a phased approach and troubleshoot issues as needed.

Training and Support

Deliverable

The contractor shall provide training, including user guides for applicants, ARC, and the states. At ARC's discretion, the training shall be by webinar or in person and may include the provision of user guides. The training shall be user-role-specific and in group sizes determined by ARC. Once all deliverables are implemented, the contractor shall provide a comprehensive user guide, which is also available within OSCAR and searchable by subject. The contractor shall also provide to ARC's IT department a complete review of the application (UI, WebAPI, and database) using the technical review approach detailed in the Appendix, plus a complete documentation review of the code.

Proposal Submittal

Preparation and Submission

Vendors will prepare proposals in compliance with all instructions outlined in the RFP. Partial or incomplete proposals will be rejected. The proposal must be signed by an officer of the responding organization. The RFP selection process will remain open until a vendor is found.

Please submit a PDF copy of your proposal, including all supporting documentation, to Marc Hutzell, Director of Information Technology, at mhutzell@arc.gov.

ARC will provide a demo of OSCAR in its current form upon request.

Contact Marc Hutzell with any questions about the RFP at 202-884-7775 or mhutzell@arc.gov.

Schedule for Evaluation Process

RFP distributed to vendors	December 4, 2020
ARC OSCAR demonstrations for vendors	Upon request
Deadline for vendor questions	January 11, 2021
Deadline for RFP responses	January 29, 2021
Selection of vendor/contract negotiation	Mid-February 2021

Proposal Format

To facilitate the evaluation of the proposals, vendors shall utilize the following proposal format:

- Executive summary
- Company information
- Written description of the features and functionality the candidate proposes to meet the needs of the electronic application system
- Projects similar in scope to an electronic application system

- Past clients/references (preferably federal agencies and public-private partnership projects)
- Grant management application experience
- Qualifications, background, and experience of staff proposed to work on the project
- Cost proposal
- Detailed project timeline based on deliverables
- CV/resumes of key players and subcontractors

Applicant Requirements

All vendors submitting proposals must meet the following minimum requirements at the time of proposal submittal to qualify for consideration:

- Vendor must have operated a business providing similar service and support for a minimum of five (5) years.
- Extensive experience with relevant technology (C#, asp.net, SQL server) for a minimum of five (5) years.
- Experience with U.S. government software development projects for a minimum of five (5) years.
- Grant management project experience for a minimum of five (5) years.
- Vendor must follow all city, county, and state business licensing, bond, and insurance requirements.
- List at least five (5) companies/customers as references. Provide company name, address, contact name, and telephone numbers, developed and supported software, and duration of relationship.

Basis of Award

The following criteria will be used to evaluate each RFP response :

- Experience and demonstrated ability with building a grant application platform, project management experience, software development, and implementation
- Credible management proposal for staffing and capability to carry out the project in a timely fashion
- Proposed approach for gathering and finalizing work requirements
- Development plan support to include software troubleshooting, fixing defects, and testing that would contain regression testing
- List key team members and responsibilities
- Post-launch support plan
- Pricing, including detailed budget breakdown
- Client references for projects with similar type and scope
- Results of requested demonstrations and presentations

Contract Type

The Appalachian Regional Commission is accepting Firm Fixed Price including Labor and other direct costs and Time and Materials contracts

Term of Contract

The initial contract term for this software development project will be negotiated at the time of contract award.

Period of Performance

The period of performance is until all deliverables as described in this RFP and any subsequently assigned deliverables are accepted as final and approved by the ARC project coordinator.

ARC's Right to No Award

ARC reserves the right to reject all proposals, reject portions of any proposal, or accept the proposal deemed most advantageous to ARC.

Data Rights and Software Ownership

The United States Government (the government) has unlimited rights to all documents/material (including software) produced under this contract. All documents and materials, to include the source codes of any software, produced under this contract shall be government owned and are the property of the government with all rights and privileges of ownership/copyright belonging exclusively to the government. These documents and materials may not be used or sold by the contractor without written permission from the contracting officer. All materials supplied to the government shall be the sole property of the government and may not be used for any other purpose. This right does not abrogate any other government rights.

Cancellation

Should the vendor fail to meet the requirements of the contract, ARC may cancel the contract with a thirty (30) days' notice and award the remainder of the contract term to the next best vendor.

Place of Performance

All work can be performed remotely via Zoom or other video conferencing system.

Program Reporting

The contractor's project manager must furnish weekly written status reports on the activities and progress of the program, including the tracking of all task orders. The content and format of the weekly progress reports will be provided by the ARC project coordinator within ten business days after the task order award, but may be changed from time to time to better manage the support of the task order.

The report shall state the items being worked on, the progress made to date, including the percentage of work completed during the reporting period, and any outstanding action items from previous reviews to the ARC project coordinator or the designated task manager.

The written status report must also include specific discussion on difficulties encountered and remedial action taken during the reporting period and the contractor's anticipated activity during the subsequent reporting period. The progress report shall contain, at a minimum, the following information relative to the period being reported:

- Name(s) of contractor team member(s), their labor category, and labor category rate.
- A brief description of the work accomplished toward completing their tasks, emphasizing the progress made since the last reporting period.
- A list of any unresolved and/or anticipated problems, if any (include schedule impacts).
- An estimate of the percent of all work accomplished to date.
- A statement on the status of a task as it relates to the schedule. The contractor shall state that the task is either on schedule, or explain the nature and extent of any delay(s), to include the anticipated impact on the task.
- A description of work planned for the next reporting period.
- A list of risks and mitigation strategies.
- A list of action items, assignees, and status of the action item (including information assurance items).

Financial Reporting

The contractor must submit a monthly financial report which tracks the planned to actual expenditures. The financial report must include the following:

- The budgeted and actual amounts for the month.
- The budgeted and actual cumulative totals to date.
- The variance amount and percentage for the month and cumulative to date.
- Each labor category, labor category rate, and total cost of each labor category during the reporting period.

Status Meetings

The contractor shall create an agenda, report, and meeting minutes for each weekly and/or monthly status meeting. The agenda shall be available and distributed one (1) business day prior to a meeting. The comprehensive meeting minutes shall be available and distributed within one (1) business day after the meeting. Contractor shall provide mock-ups, live test systems (betas), and release candidates.

Inspection and Acceptance Criteria

Deliverables are not accepted as final until approved by the ARC project coordinator. The ARC project coordinator will reject deliverables that do not meet the requirements of this RFP and existing ARC policies and documented standard operating procedures (SOPs). All ARC policies and SOPs will be made available to the contractor by request following the award of this contract.

Software deliverables cannot be accepted as final until all testing has been completed without any known (unless approved by ARC) or undisclosed severity 1–3 defects, including high cybersecurity findings.

Training and Support

Training

- Provide details on how user training shall be conducted for the developed software.
- Provide details of the availability of additional training (cost, duration, user level).

Support

- How project technical support will be handled
- Days and hours of support availability
- Methods of support contact (email, telephone, real time online, etc.)
- Average support call back time
- Average problem resolution time

ARC is soliciting competitive proposals because it has determined that this process best serves the needs and interest of ARC and the public. As such, all organizations will be afforded full opportunity to submit proposals in response to the RFP, and no organization or person shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, color, citizenship status, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran status, political affiliation, or any other factor protected by law in consideration for an award issued pursuant to this RFP. ARC is committed to the principles of equal opportunity and the elimination of all vestiges of discriminatory practices that might exist.