**Request for Proposal**
**Technology Consultation for Grants Management Application**

**Posted**          April 14, 2021

**Responses due**          May 14, 2021

**Overview**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) seeks proposals from companies and consultants to **analyze, understand, and recommend a technology strategy/roadmap that will compliantly and efficiently automate (pre-application to close-out) ARC's grants management process.** ARC currently has an operational grants management system, ARCnet, a grant-specific application system, POWER Portal, and the foundation of a universal application intake platform, OSCAR. The result of this project will be technology strategy recommendations to the Executive Director for providing a fully digital means for managing our grants programs and funding sources.  The contractor will be expected to:

    a.  Fully understand ARC's grants management business processes for all grant types and programs (pre-application, application, pre-award review, grant agreement, approvals, reports, amendments, close-outs) including integration with 13 states and grantees. This includes the need for additional facilitation and refinement of business process consensus and documentation to further refine, sequence, and prioritize.

    b.  Fully understand ARC's current technology status including the currently operational grants management application, ARCnet, the currently operational POWER application system, the to-be-completed grants intake application, OSCAR, the third-party system, Reviewr, and any other technology/data systems and processes. Identify gaps and inefficiencies in business automation processes.

    c.  Translate all business process requirements into relevant system requirements to visualize automation. **Based on the attained understanding of ARC's grant management requirements, provide expert recommendations for a fully automated/digital, end-to-end grants management application system resulting in a compliant and efficient process for all of ARC's current (and future) funding programs and initiatives**. Such recommendations could include, for example, continued development of ARCnet and the current OSCAR application program, design and development of a new proprietary system, or a flexible COTS solution that can support ARC's requirements and future plans. Include estimated time frames, costs, and pros/cons for all recommendations provided.

d. Understand that ARC will need to maintain the current iteration of ARCnet, third-party applications, and other systems as needed, during any period of development to ensure continuity of operations.

**ARC Background**

Who we are:  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 the Appalachian Regional Commission can be found at www.arc.gov.

What we do: Each year ARC provides funding for about 450 investments (projects) and in recent years the investments totaled about $150 million per year 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. ARC invests in activities that address the five goals identified in the organization's strategic plan. Projects are allocated among different programs within ARC, depending upon funding source and line of work.

Recent History: Over the past few years, ARC projects have expanded to include not only our base funding of grants, "Area Development", but also specific funding for economic development in a variety of areas. One of which is focused on coal-impacted communities through the POWER Initiative (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization).  This initiative targets federal resources to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production. Another recent example includes INSPIRE (INvestments Supporting Partnerships In Recovery Ecosystems (INSPIRE) Initiative). This initiative is to support innovative efforts to establish community-based Substance Use Disorder (SUD) recovery ecosystems to save lives and strengthen the Region.

While ARC has worked to define and solidify many business processes, some work remains to ensure the grants management process is adequately defined through consensus building then documented in technical requirements. These requirements should lead to the development of

a fully automated, end-to-end grants management system for all types of ARC grants and funding.

**Project and Deliverables**

ARC seeks an experienced company, consultant, or organization to analyze and fully understand ARC's grants business processes, requirements, and current technological capabilities and gaps, including applications, system proposals, and development in-progress. Based upon this understanding, recommend the best options considering all resource allocations such as time, money, opportunity costs, and benefits. Each recommended option must include trade-offs, both direct and opportunity costs and benefits.

ARC's ultimate goal is to have a grants management application to fully automate the business workflow from pre-application through project close-out. ARC's grant management work and access to the database must continue uninterrupted throughout the entire development project. The system should have the capability to process applications and maintain data for multiple types of grants, funding sources, and grant initiatives (i.e. POWER, INSPIRE). The ability to quickly stand up applications for new initiatives and at a reasonable cost is necessary. System development will need a phased approach that considers ARC's staff demands during the last 3 months of the fiscal year (July – September).

While the program team members are the primary internal users of the system, the application must involve multiple and varied functions within ARC such as:

- Finance (to make the payments, track expenditures, comply with financial audits, and report financial data for outside organizations),
- Legal (prepare grant agreements, contracts, amendments for signature by grantees),
- ARC IT Staff (to trouble shoot technical issues and answer grantee user problems and to continue application development as needed),
- Research & Planning (collect, consume and validate data),
- Communications (disseminate information about projects that meet best practice and respond to inquiries from press and media),
- Event Planning (query data for conferences, webinars, workshops, presentations, speakers).

External users include grantees, ARC's State personnel involved with the ARC program, such as program managers and alternates from our 13 states, Federal and State Basic Agencies, and Local Development Districts (LDDs).

All of these users have varying degrees of comfort and experience with database management applications thus it must be intuitive, user-friendly with a professional appearance that has a layout to well-known applications that external stakeholders would be familiar with.

Our grants management process is complicated by a few unique requirements. The needs and requirements of 13-member states must be accommodated while still gaining process

efficiencies. The system must meet certain federal government security standards. Lastly, due to the changing nature of our work and funding, the system must provide maximum flexibility while still gaining efficiencies.

Technology Specifications of Current and In-progress Systems

- ARCnet is the current overarching grants management application
- ARCnet was first developed in the late 1990s and uses C# coding with moderate code documentation embedded
- ARCnet is located on local ARC SQL servers
- ARCnet currently has 5,280 users, 32,000 records, and is 5GB size
- ARCnet has test, staging, and production environments
- The POWER portal is a grants application system that is similar to the ARCnet code, structure, and architecture. Once applications are completed, a transfer process occurs between POWER and ARCnet for grant management purposes.
- A third-party application, Reviewr, is currently being used for INSPIRE application intake and review
- OSCAR is ARC's custom-developed application platform to replace the current paper-based process; development began in 2020
- OSCAR utilizes React on the front-end to access a .NET Core Web API on the backend and is hosted in ARC's Azure tenant
- We have three proposals to complete OSCAR development
- All application information/data gathered via OSCAR is expected to be transferred to ARCnet; the mapping documentation is approximately 75% complete

**Proposal Requirements**

Submitted proposals must include the following:

1. A brief description of the consultants/organization, including an outline of the organization's structure, background, financial status, and the number of years in operation. Consultants with grants management/making experience (i.e. foundations, agencies giving out money, Federal grants), end-to-end systems (application through close-out), and multi-tier stakeholder systems are preferred.
2. A description of the approach to this project, including methodology, communication, perspective, or philosophy that guides the work. Detailed project plan, the scope of services, timeline, and list of project deliverables to be created.
3. A detailed budget that breaks out all expenses, including personnel, travel, lodging, meals, supplies, materials, overhead, and other expenses.
4. Credentials and qualifications of key personnel who will take responsibility for working directly on this project. Please provide curriculum vitae for the lead organizational staff who will be working on this project.

5. A minimum of three references, including contact information, from relevant organizations with whom the consultant has completed similar projects within the past two years.
6. If subcontractors will be used, please include the resume(s) and qualifications of the subcontractor.

Proposal Submission Process
The deadline for submission is 5pm ET on Friday, May 14, 2021. Hard copy proposals will not be accepted. Applications are encouraged as soon as possible. Proposals should be submitted electronically in PDF format to:
Marc Hutzell  mhutzell@arc.gov
William Grant  wgrant@arc.gov
Allison Thiriez  athiriez@arc.gov

ARC is open to having an informational call to help clarify or further explain anything related to this RFP. Please email the team to schedule a day/time:
Marc Hutzell  mhutzell@arc.gov
William Grant  wgrant@arc.gov
Allison Thiriez  athiriez@arc.gov

Proposal Review Procedure and Scoring Criteria
In awarding a contract for consulting services for this project, ARC will examine several factors and criteria will include:
• Demonstrated ability and expertise in content areas identified in this document
• Qualifications and experience of consultant(s) in providing support for key functions
• The extent to which the proposal addresses the goals of this proposal and clearly describes the scope of work
• Specific plans to be used to perform the services
• Availability for work to be conducted during the proposed project timeframe
• Project cost

Timeline
RFP Issue date: April 14, 2021
Submission Deadline: May 14, 2021
Anticipated Interviews/Presentations: June 4, 2021
Anticipated Selection date: June 18, 2021
Anticipated Contract start date: June 28, 2021
Anticipated Completion date: September 24, 2021

General Requirements
The contract award is anticipated to cover work that is expected to be completed within about 3 months. ARC expects the contracted consultant to have the capacity to provide services in Washington, DC and readily available for consultation or meetings as needed. Before

engagement, the selected consultant will enter into a contractual arrangement with ARC that will include, but not be limited to, the following requirements:

• Complete IRS Tax Form W-9 and file any tax reports and tax returns required by any federal, state, or local government
• Warrant that the services provided do not infringe any copyright, trademark, patent, or other intellectual property right of any third party
• Agree that all deliverables constitute "works made for hire" and that such works constitute and contain proprietary assets and confidential work product
• Commit to completing the consulting engagement for an amount not to exceed the agreed-upon compensation

ARC is committed to ensuring that equal opportunity is provided to minority enterprises and that its contractors have active diversity programs in their workforces and are sensitive to issues of race and gender. No person shall be subjected to discrimination on account of any services or activities resulting from this RFP, on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, race, color, creed, national origin, age (except under minimum age and retirement provisions), marital or veteran status, the presence of any sensory, mental or physical handicap or any other protected class. Any violation of a material provision of this procurement shall be grounds for termination or suspension in whole or in part of any related agreement by ARC. Respondents shall at all times in the proposal and contract process comply with all applicable state and federal anti-discrimination laws, rules, regulations, and requirements.

Right to Reject
ARC reserves the right to:
• Reject any or all proposals submitted
• Request additional information from any or all respondents
• Conduct discussions with respondents to assure full understanding of, and responsiveness to, the solicitation requirements
• Negotiate modifications to a respondent's proposal before final award to obtain best and final offers
• Approve or reject any subcontractors proposed or used in carrying out the work

Contact Information
Questions related to this proposal should be submitted to Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to:

Marc Hutzell  mhutzell@arc.gov
William Grant  wgrant@arc.gov
Allison Thiriez  athiriez@arc.gov