



Downtown Revitalization Projects

This document provides specific guidance for **downtown revitalization projects**. Applications may involve multiple activities as part of a single project; ARC encourages applicants to review the specific guidance for each type of activity included in an application.

All application guidance is grounded in the goals and principles of ARC's current strategic plan, which emphasize strategic focus, collaboration, sustainability, and measurable impact in ARC investments.

Downtown revitalization projects can include anything from plans to streetscapes, from signage to the renovation of historic buildings or city parks to create programming. Ultimately, this type of project should support the businesses, residents, and visitors in the target downtown area, and should emphasize economic development in its benefits, rationale, and performance measures. ARC categorizes downtowns as a cultural asset of a community and invests in downtown revitalization projects under Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan however, components of downtown revitalization projects may fall under other goals.

Examples of possible downtown revitalization projects include, but are not limited to:

- Downtown revitalization plan that analyzes the economic, geographic, transportation, and aesthetic conditions of a community's downtown, including action items to guide community implementation efforts
- Gateway plan to explore the potential for linking a community's economic core and an adjacent institution, public land, or other significant asset such as colleges or universities, recreational resource, or historic entertainment venue
- Restoration of an historic theatre or upgrade to a public space for outdoor markets with the goal to bring more foot traffic to downtown business district. Note: Any space improved with ARC funds must remain under public ownership
- Streetscape improvement program, which often includes water and sewer and is centered on a community-based planning effort, with goals that primarily include improving safety, aesthetics, as well as providing direct benefit to businesses.
- Business Development Program (i.e., training) that downtown business owners and their staff can participate in

Basic Agencies (for construction projects only)

ARC does not administer any construction projects, including those involving Downtown Revitalization. ARC operates in partnership with federal and state agencies under an MOU to manage federal construction grants throughout the region.

It is the applicant's responsibility to secure a letter from the appropriate federal or state agency, known as a basic agency letter, indicating their willingness to administer ARC funds for any proposed infrastructure project. A list of eligible basic agencies can be found at <https://www.arc.gov/basic-agency-partners/>.

Once an ARC construction grant is approved, grantees are encouraged to reach out directly to their basic agency to develop an implementation plan and schedule.

Key Principles of ARC Downtown Revitalization Investments:

As outlined in ARC's strategic plan, activities should be strategic, collaborative, sustainable, and impactful.

Strategic:

More Information

For general guidance on how to develop a complete and competitive application for ARC project funding, all applicants should refer to the application framework and instructions detailed in the [Checklist for ARC Non-Construction Project Applications](#) form or the [Checklist for ARC Construction Project Applications](#) form, as appropriate, available in the applicant resources section of our website.

Applicants should also consult their ARC State Program Manager*, their state's Appalachian Development Plan* and Annual Strategy Statement* for additional information.

*This information can be found [HERE](#) by navigating to the page and clicking on the appropriate state link.

- Identify the conditions that create a need for the project. Demonstrate the opportunity for positive change to result from the project. Employ research and explore marketing strategies to optimize the project's economic impact.

Sustainable:

- For planning projects, consider potential funding sources for implementation prior to applying for planning funds. Streetscape and building renovation applicants must identify how improvements will be maintained, and by whom.
- Identify specific revenue streams where possible, particularly if revenues are generated from project improvements.

Collaborative:

- Common partners on downtown revitalization projects include local business owners, local and regional economic development professionals, education leadership, visitors or tourism specialists, representatives from the local arts community, and property owners.
- Particular emphasis should be placed on the support of business and property owners, which should be clearly demonstrated in an ARC application package with the inclusion of letters of support.

Impactful:

- Consider how tangible economic benefits from the project will be measured, with an established method defined for tracking project performance after funding. Determine a realistic approach to tracking committed performance measures.
- For planning projects, performance will be measured by the number of plans/reports generated and the number of programs implemented. Other downtown projects track new visitors, businesses served and improved (explain how they will be improved), linear feet of sidewalk/streetscape improved, or square footage of façade improved. Reference ARC's Guidance on Performance Measures for additional information.

Other Considerations

- Planning projects can focus on the downtown or a specific part of the downtown, such as a gateway or link to a key community asset. Most plans are driven by a recent change: the loss of a large employer, a growing tourism economy, a new development that will bring more people into the area, or a change in demographics or development patterns.
- Feasibility studies, marketing studies, as well as evidence of demand (i.e., letters of support and descriptive text) are strongly encouraged and may be required. All downtown revitalization projects should address local and regional priorities identified through a recent planning process.
- Vacant or dilapidated structures in a downtown area, if left unaddressed, can lead to a significant decline in investment and a reduction in the property value of building stock. These conditions can place an entire downtown at risk of economic decline. Communities have applied several approaches to correct this trend. Blight reduction projects must carry a strong economic argument, and a preliminary feasibility and marketing study is strongly encouraged.
- Any projects involving construction will require a basic agency to administer project funds, and contracted construction work will need to follow federal procurement guidelines and wage rates.

Helpful Resources:

- ARC Applicant Resources <https://www.arc.gov/applicant-resources/>
- Information Specific to ARC States <https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-states/>
- USDA National Agricultural Library <https://www.nal.usda.gov/rural-development-communities/downtown-revitalization>
- Downtown Development Center <https://ddc.downtowndevelopment.com/>
- Smart Growth America <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/rebuilding-downtown/>
- Redevelopment Resources <https://redevelopment-resources.com/>
- Main Street America <https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/theapproach>