



ARISE Program Evaluation
Year One Final Report

September 2024



Summary

This report is the first in a series of annual evaluation reports for the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) program.

ARISE is ARC's multi-state initiative that aims to drive large-scale, regional economic transformation through collaborative projects. With the additional funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), ARC launched ARISE to strengthen Appalachian business and industry, and to grow and support the development of new opportunities across multiple states. ARISE encourages initiatives that go beyond borders and help the 13 Appalachian states advance ARC's strategic investment priorities as one, united Appalachia

Year 1 Key Findings

Based on a combination of project-level inquiry with initiative-level analysis designed to summarize progress and record early impacts, as well as to identify emerging themes related to implementation successes, challenges, and experiences implementing multi-state projects, the Year 1 evaluation offers the following key findings:

Overall, ARISE grantees and partners report confidence they will be able to achieve project objectives and produce expected results within the period of performance. In the Grantee and Partner Self-Assessment, 114 individuals rated Progress Toward Project Objectives, Sustainability, Multi-state Impact, and Equitable Share of Benefits from Collaboration an average of "High."

ARISE grantees are making progress on milestones and progress toward results. As of September 2024, 11 grantees had provided interim performance data to ARC. Collectively, they have reported serving nearly 3,200 people (students, workers, and participants), with nearly 3,000 improved; serving about 1,250 businesses and organizations, with nearly 250 businesses improved; and serving nearly 500 communities, with 364 improved. By detailed metric, results to date are as follows:

- 1,788 students served (n=2 projects)
- 1,526 students improved (n=2 projects)
- 850 workers served (n=1 project)
- 850 workers improved (n=1 project)
- 547 participants served (n=1 project)
- 547 participants improved (n=1 project)
- 1,091 businesses served (n=4 projects)
- 242 businesses improved (n=4 projects)
- 453 communities served (n=4 projects)
- 364 communities improved (n=3 projects)
- 156 organizations served (n=1 projects)
- 17 plans/reports produced (n=8 projects)
- 7 programs implemented (n=2 projects)

Grantees report more strengths than challenges. Key strengths among ARISE-funded projects are adaptability, effectiveness of communication, and common vision as accelerators of success. The multi-state nature of ARISE projects has required additional work on the part of grantees and partners to establish a functional governance structure and facilitate effective cross-state collaboration. Even these elements, however, were rated at least “Medium” by most grantees and partners on all self-assessed projects.

ARC’s communication continues to be a strong point. Grantees and partners voiced appreciation for the additional technical assistance and resources available to ARISE applicants, developed throughout Year One.

Regarding ARC’s grantmaking, grantees and partners suggested:

- If granting to an entity outside of Appalachia, ensure partnerships are already established or make a planning grant to establish partnerships, prior to funding an implementation project.
- Continue to make long-term, multi-stage investments toward change.
- Continue to require multi-state partnerships as core to the design of an ARISE project.
- Highlight the ways ARISE supports and enhances other federal investment.

Regarding ARISE grant processes, grantees and partners suggested:

- To the extent appropriate, provide examples and templates as grantee resources.
- To the extent appropriate, facilitate connections between applicants and those involved in the application review process, to promote information sharing and the flow of the application process.
- Continue to standardize application components.
- Consider the potential for projects with multiple co-leads.
- Organize the feedback process in a way that allows for the tracking of revisions and the context behind the feedback and encourage grantees to do the same.

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Introduction

About ARISE

Purpose

Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) is ARC's multi-state initiative that aims to drive large-scale, regional economic transformation through collaborative projects. With the additional funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), ARC launched ARISE to strengthen Appalachian business and industry, and to grow and support the development of new opportunities across multiple states. ARISE encourages initiatives that go beyond borders and help the 13 Appalachian states advance ARC's strategic investment priorities as one, united Appalachia.

ARISE was built on the following **rationales**:

- Significant economic opportunities often reach across state lines.
- A multistate approach can enable ARC states acting collectively to realize economic advantages that are greater than the states acting individually.
- True collaboration requires at least one partner in each project state.
- Transformation can come either from geography-based configurations or program-based configurations.
- Strong project implementation requires a solid plan at the outset.
- Planning grants can help applicants better prepare for implementation (but are not the only way for grantees to prepare a plan).
- Memoranda of Understanding facilitate equitable partnerships, with shared input, goals, accountability, and benefits for each partner.
- Monetary and non-monetary investments from strategic partners reinforce multistate commitment.
- Benefits at the regional level also positively impact states and counties.

ARC staff carry out the following initiative-level **activities** in support of the overarching ARISE goal:

- Fund planning projects that align with ARC investment priorities and state economic development goals.
- Fund implementation projects that align with ARC investment priorities and state economic development goals.
- Provide technical assistance to applicants.
- Provide technical assistance to grantees through implementation support and evaluation processes.
- Highlight and share best practices of regional initiatives.
- Replicate best practices to promote sustainability.
- Foster sustainable coalition building.

These activities are designed to contribute to initiative-level **results**:

- *Outputs*

- Achievement of project outputs in line with ARC investment priorities.
- Additional (perhaps unplanned) positive results from projects.
- More implementation project proposals.

- *Short- and medium-term outcomes*

- Achievement of project outcomes in line with ARC investment priorities.
- Leveraging of regional assets.
- Progress toward economic transformation.
- Additional (perhaps unplanned) positive outcomes from projects.
- Development/strengthening of partnerships across state lines.
- Counties improve along economic classification system.
- Increased economic competitiveness.
- Stronger implementation project proposals.

- *Long-term outcomes*

- Regional economic transformation.
- Independent (outside of ARISE) collaboration for future work.
- More counties achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation.
- Aggregate economic impact that is greater than isolated activity in any one state.
- Economic competitiveness for Appalachia.
- Changes in conversations in the region about how to approach major economic development, on a larger scale.

The primary resources invested in ARISE include funding; ARC and state partner investment, including human capital; and other monetary and non-monetary investment in each project, including from private and philanthropic organizations and government entities.

As of September 2024, ARC has invested \$88.2 million in 34 ARISE projects, including 11 implementation projects and 23 planning projects. In line with the intent of ARISE, these projects support ARC's broader strategic plan goals:

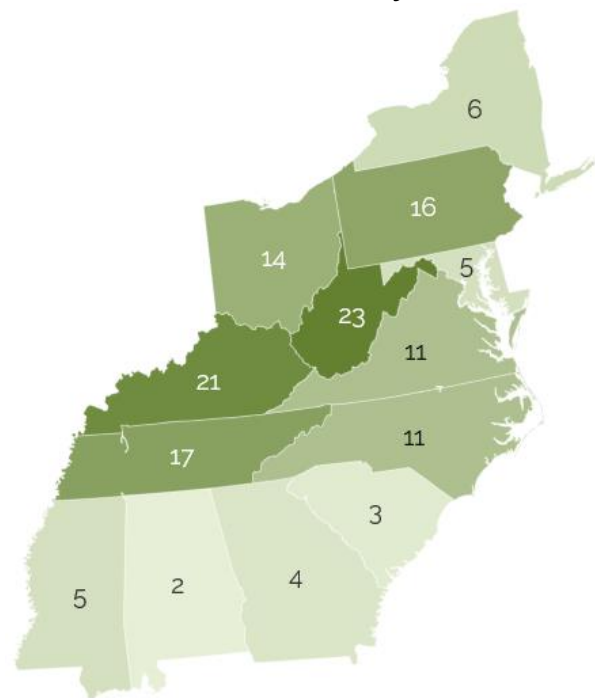
- **Building Appalachian Businesses** by strengthening and diversifying the regional economy through inclusive economic development strategies and investments in entrepreneurship and business development.
- **Building Appalachia's Workforce Ecosystem** by expanding and strengthening community systems that help Appalachians obtain and retain jobs and advance along financially sustaining career pathways.
- **Building Appalachia's Infrastructure** by ensuring that Appalachian businesses and residents have access to reliable, affordable, resilient, and energy efficient utilities and infrastructure to successfully live and work in the Region.
- **Building Regional Culture and Tourism** by preserving and investing in the Region's local, cultural heritage and natural assets.
- **Building Community Leaders and Capacity** by providing technical assistance and support to access resources, engage partners, identify strategies and tactics, and conduct effective planning and project execution.

ARISE is focused on multi-state partnerships and multi-state impacts, and all 13 states are represented in ARISE projects. The number of states covered in individual ARISE projects ranges from two to 12, and the typical project has partners in three to four states. West Virginia is included in the largest number of projects (23), followed by Kentucky (21), Tennessee (17), Pennsylvania (16), and Ohio (14).

About the Evaluation

The ARISE evaluation is designed to follow each ARISE-funded project throughout its period of performance, to maximize the usefulness of evaluation data for ARISE stakeholders as projects are occurring. The evaluation combines this project-level inquiry with initiative-level analysis to summarize progress; identify emerging themes related to grantee and partner successes, challenges, and experiences implementing multi-state projects; and record early impacts of ARISE-funded projects.

Number of ARISE Projects by State



Evaluation Questions and Methodology

The initiative-level evaluation examines:

- Grantee feedback about the ARISE application process (e.g., how grantees found out about ARISE, their level of preparation to apply, the usefulness of the resources and technical assistance provided by ARC, etc.)
- Successes and challenges grantees experienced during implementation, including those related to implementing multi-state projects
- Early impacts of individual grants, eventually with state-level sums
- Early impacts of the initiative, with a particular focus on transformation

Following the announcement of a new project, the ARISE evaluator holds an orientation and planning call with the grantee (and its partners, if desired). In collaboration with each grantee, the evaluator creates an evaluation plan for implementation projects, which includes a plan for engaging beneficiaries in the evaluation, if possible. At ARC's direction, the evaluation adapts to each project's timeline and context; therefore, the default evaluation activities may be adjusted to maximize logic and usefulness of the evaluation, and minimize burden, for the grantee and ARC. By default, however, a standard set of evaluation activities is occurring for each project, along that project's individual timeline. See Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation Activities by Project Type

EVALUATION ACTIVITY	IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SCHEDULE	PLANNING PROJECT SCHEDULE
Grantee & partner self-assessment	Semi-annually on project's schedule	Semi-annually on project's schedule
Grantee interview	Annually on project's schedule	Annually on project's schedule
Grantee progress report review	Quarterly as applicable	Quarterly as applicable
Partner group interviews	Annually on project's schedule	N/A
Beneficiary feedback collection	Annually as feasible and applicable	N/A

The evaluation will also consider other, grantee-generated data as applicable and available.

Data sources for this Year One Report include:

- Project applications and approval memos from all projects.
- Progress updates (interim outputs and outcomes) from 11 projects.
- Grantee-generated reports from 19 projects.¹
- Grantee and partner self-assessments from 114 individuals representing 11 projects.
- Individual and group interviews with 36 grantee and partner personnel representing six projects.

A total of 20 ARISE projects are represented across these Year One data sources. Projects included in this evaluation report are listed in [Appendix A](#). Evaluation limitations are listed in [Appendix C](#).

Early Progress and Evidence of Impact

Self-assessed Progress

The Year One Grantee and Partner Self-assessment asked project implementers to rate the status of their project—Low, Medium, High, with descriptors for each level for each element. Elements were drawn from previous ARC-commissioned research, completed by American Institutes for Research (AIR), which identified multiple factors as important to the success of multistate projects. Together with ARC, the ARISE evaluators expanded on AIR's *ARISE: A Regional Multistate Collaboration Toolkit*, to ask grantees and partners to rate 15 elements.

Four Self-assessment elements are related to progress and results. These are listed in Table 2, along with their average score in the Grantee and Partner Self-assessment. See [Appendix B](#) for descriptors of Low, Medium, and High for each Self-assessment item.

¹ Includes the most recent and comprehensive report available for each grantee, prioritized in the following order: closeout report, certified progress report, ARC staff-uploaded file, or details from the ARCnet progress report tab.

Table 2: Self-assessment Average Scores for Progress and Results Elements

SELF-ASSESSMENT ITEM (n=11 projects)	OVERALL AVERAGE 1 (Low) to 3 (High)	EQUIVALENT
Progress Toward Project Objectives	2.52	High
Sustainability	2.49	High
Multi-state Impact	2.47	High
Equitable Share of Benefits from Collaboration	2.46	High

Overall, each of these items received an average rating roughly equivalent to High on a scale of 1 (Low) to 3 (High).

Outputs and Outcomes to Date

As of September 2024, 11 grantees had provided performance data to ARC; 10 of these projects reported interim data and were still open, and one project had closed. Collectively, they have reported serving nearly 3,200 people (students, workers, and participants), with nearly 3,000 improved; serving about 1,250 businesses and organizations, with nearly 250 businesses improved; and serving nearly 500 communities, with 364 improved. By detailed metric, results to date are as follows:

- 1,788 students served (n=2 projects)
- 1,526 students improved (n=2 projects)
- 850 workers served (n=1 project)
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To date, one project has closed and has reported closeout metrics. The grantee reported meeting 100% of all planned outputs and outcomes. See Table 3.

Table 3: Closeout Results versus Planned

METRIC	PLANNED	CLOSEOUT	PCT. OF PLANNED
Businesses served (n=1 project)	12	12	100%
Businesses improved (n=1 project)	17	17	100%
Plans/Reports Produced (n=1 project)	12	12	100%

Other Evidence of Progress

In addition to quantitative progress, grantees have reported a range of other achievements, including the following examples.

An employer unexpectedly expanding on an ARISE program: The CAREERS project reported that the “resounding success” of the Toyota 4T Academy has led Toyota “to implement a mentor style program for their new hires during the onboarding process. While this mentor program will be working with the general adult population of the Toyota team members, it speaks to the positive ripple effects that CAREERS 4T program is having in West Virginia.”

Hundreds of millions of dollars in funding applications for communities in Appalachia: The ARCO-GRIP project has supported moving more than “\$300M of grants through the application to the negotiation phase. We have now met or exceeded all of our proposed project outcomes including 4 baseline reports, 4 project plans, and multiple in-depth resilience reports, including 22 applications for Federal funding. Through our work, the electric cooperative and municipal utility community in Appalachia has increased confidence in participating in federal funding opportunities, and we believe that the states involved will commit significant resources to ARC stakeholders, particularly via the 40101(d) program.”

Multi-state relationship development even beyond what was planned for the project: A subrecipient of the Appalachian Digital Equity Accelerator (ADEA) project described increased networking and planning across state lines: “Participating in this project has also helped make connections that can further broadband work on other fronts. [...] Generation West Virginia reached out recently as one of their regional partners is looking for opportunities to partner across state lines on a possible broadband workforce project. People Inc. recently began providing workforce development services in the counties that border West Virginia and is also looking at how we might be able to better work with WV partners for training and employment projects. The discussion is just starting, but connections like this that further the big picture goal of connectivity and also the individual goals of each organization are a great plus to participating in this project.”

The value of learning and developing a better plan, out of the ARISE planning grant: One planning grantee shared how the planning process gave them “the opportunity to flesh out [a plan]. You have these grand ideas, but when you get into the weeds of it, things become evident... We discovered that all six states have some degree of this work going on, so rather than reinventing that... the planning grant time gave us the space and the time to really investigate. Rather than just creating a plan, we [created a plan that] has merit. ... The good news is, if we don't [get an implementation grant], all six of these states are doing what we suggested... and so it's going to keep going.”

Implementation Themes

As noted above, the 15-question Grantee and Partner Self-assessment asked project implementers to rate four elements related to progress and results, as well as 10 elements related to implementation and one element on their partnership overall. In Year One, the Grantee and Partner Self-assessment was administered a total of 12 times, representing 11 projects, and received a total of 114 responses. Table 4 shows the 11 elements and their equivalent average scores for Year One.

Table 4: Self-assessment Average Scores for Project Implementation Elements

SELF-ASSESSMENT ITEM (n=11 projects)	OVERALL AVERAGE 1 (Low) to 3 (High)	EQUIVALENT
Adaptability	2.71	High
Effectiveness of Communication	2.63	High
Common Vision	2.58	High
Convening/Communication Structure for Collaboration	2.56	High
Resource Allocation	2.54	High
Use of Time	2.52	High
Partners' Commitment and Engagement	2.51	High
Use of Data	2.43	High
Collaboration Among Partners	2.38	High
Governance and Decision-making	2.33	Medium
Overall Effectiveness	2.57	High

See [Appendix B](#) for the full Year One Grantee and Partner Self-assessment.

Grantees (for all projects) and partners (for implementation projects only) were also asked to participate in an evaluation interview annually. In Year One interviews, grantees and partners were asked about their general perceptions of project strengths and challenges and, specifically, to elaborate on the elements that ranked highest and lowest for their project. In this reporting period, evaluators completed interviews with 37 individuals from six projects: 14 individuals from lead grantee organizations and 23 individuals from partner organizations.

Strengths and Accelerators

In the Self-assessment, half or more of the responding grantees and partners rated the following elements as High (a score of 3): Adaptability, Effectiveness of Communication, Common Vision, Convening/Communication Structure for Collaboration, and Use of Time. Most respondents also rated Overall Effectiveness as High.

Additionally, Resource Allocation received an average score above 2.5 for those with an opinion; however, a relatively large portion of respondents (25%, n=27) said they were Unsure about Resource Allocation, a response that is not factored into the average score.

Adaptability

On the Self-assessment, nearly two-thirds of grantees and partners (65%, n=72) rated Adaptability a 3: Flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges. This item rated among the top three by average score in eight of 12 Self-assessment administrations.

In progress reports, grantees described the process of learning through implementation and responding to unanticipated hurdles. For example, in one trail project, "a major snowstorm and flash flood warnings impacted the trail crews' ability to add linear footage to the trail. The project schedule was adjusted to focus on preparatory and administrative tasks." A broadband planning project encountered technology integration and operationalization challenges when new software was not compatible with old hardware. The project team reallocated time and brought in technical experts to find a solution. That same project spent five months trying to fill a specialist position. Despite reportedly conducting outreach worldwide to identify the right fit, the grantee could not find someone willing to relocate at the available compensation. Instead, the grantee worked with ARC to amend their budget and reallocate funds to procure consulting services. In hindsight, the grantee reported that the consulting services have produced ancillary benefits that mean the revised course of action may have been superior to the original plan anyway.

In interviews, grantees and partners shared several factors that supported adaptability:

- **Grantee leadership and openness:** "It's not just, here it is, take it as it is. It's, here's what we're working on, and we want to hear what you think, and we'll make changes as we go. And we get good feedback from our partners."
- **Partner disposition:** "[Adaptability is] a trait that all of our partners have, they're really innovative and they're willing to just try something and adapt as they go. We found that's kind of the best, the qualities that we look for in both school and business...just having those innovative partners that are willing to try different things and get state of the art equipment and really just do something new." As another said, "So with this grant, there is more flexibility, I think. And I think in some ways it's relieving to staff. At first I think it was like, you're finally let out of the box, and it was like, 'Am I really free?' You have to get used to the idea that there's that flexibility and you don't have all these constraints of who can be enrolled and that sort of thing."
- **The flexibility of ARC and the ARISE initiative.** "From ARC's standpoint, they said multiple times if things need to change, or you need more time. It wasn't like everything is written in stone and your hands are tied. If I had gone in and said we have a massive change in direction, they would have been open to that." As another said, "I'm not sure we could try and do this kind of project under any other funding stream. I can't imagine trying to do this through [other agencies] or some of those other organizations that might fund this."

Effectiveness of Communication

On the Self-assessment, nearly two-thirds of grantees and partners (65%, n=71) rated Effectiveness of Communication a 3: Effective communication channels and strategies in place. This item ranked among the top three most highly rated items in seven of 12 Self-assessment administrations.

One factor of effective communication is the leadership and collaboration framework itself, which is its own element in the Self-assessment. Most grantees and partners (56%, n=62) also rated this item a 3: Leadership and collaboration framework are clear and function well.

In interviews, grantees and partners shared several factors that supported effective communication:

- **The right frequency.** "We meet [with our key partner] every other week, we have a call with them... I think that's been very helpful, we wouldn't have progressed as far as we have if we weren't communicating as frequently." Another said, "We all kind of get meeting paralysis these days ever since Zoom and Teams, but I think it is nice to have those regular meetings just to talk about what's going on. ...[Sometimes] it's a conversation that means nothing to me [in the moment], but it's good to hear that stuff too because it may come up further down the line."
- **Reliable attendance.** "I think the biggest thing we've done that has been working well is that we do have a monthly partner meeting, it's virtual, and the attendance has been great. We've been on programs like this before and it is hit or miss, but not only do people attend but they're giving good feedback, they're actively engaged, so there's a culture then that you don't want to come to that meeting and have to say, oh we didn't really do anything over the last month."
- **Applicable and timely content.** "[The lead grantee] is doing a really nice job of leading our collaboration. You know, it's very structured, there's monthly meetings with agendas. The last meeting they had a marketing provider that's going to be developing shared collateral materials and things like that...I really think they have in mind how to make this, and everything that they do, applicable for everybody and to help everyone."
- **Multi-modal communication.** "The number of TA opportunities and workshops and webinars and open houses [has worked well], I think [the lead] has done everything they can to make sure we're armed with the knowledge & resources we need."
- **Openness and transparency.** "[W]e're pretty open about where we think we are, and nothing negative came out of that, there was no posturing."
- **Chances for in-person connection.** "We brought the state level department of ed. partners and some of our support partners at [our university partner] in November for a week, in addition to a lot of information it was also relationship building." As another said, "We make it a point to visit them in person, pretty often and I think those visits are really important because when you're talking in person you build better relationships than just emailing. You really get to talk to them, and they open up more, especially in the school aspect."

Common Vision

Many grantees and partners discussed the importance of establishing and maintaining a common vision, and 59% (n=66) rated their project a 3: Vision understood and shared by all partners. Although Common Vision ranked among the top three elements in only three of 12 Self-assessment administrations, it was never in the bottom three, and it was a 2.5 or higher, on average, in 10 of 12 Self-assessment administrations.

In interviews, grantees and partners talked about several factors that supported the development and maintenance of a common vision.

- **Buy-in across partners.** "I think that everyone believes in the mission, more importantly, everyone involved believes in what the point of it is, and that's probably why there's such good collaboration."
- **Connection to each partner's underlying mission.** "I think when you look at the grant and what each partner has of the grant, it lines up nicely with what they do, so I think that's helpful." Another grantee discussed how the project built upon prior work: "Our mini grant process is not new either; we've had it in place for 5 or 6 years, so we're not starting from scratch. ...[our project has] a good balance of existing, established infrastructure, experience, building on 30-plus years of experience and integrating this new topic of energy supply chain."
- **Collective momentum.** "...[E]veryone is so excited about reaching these goals and figuring out how we can do this for our students and our businesses, that's probably what helps keep me motivated is that you know, you've got so many other businesses and organizations and people involved that are all working towards this goal." Another grantee maintains project momentum through regular and intentional reflection on the human impact their grant is having: "[W]henver we have our large group meetings we try to really tell a powerful student story. [We] start with the student story...The vision isn't a word on a paper or a graph, it's a real human being that they can see the results, and I think that helps."

Barriers and Opportunities for Growth

One item, Governance and Decision-making Structure, fell below the cutoff between Medium (2) and High (3) on a scale of 1 (Low) to 3 (High); this item was also rated Medium, on average, for five projects. Two other items had overall averages equivalent to High, across all respondents, but were Medium for four projects: Collaboration Among Partners and Multi-state Impact.

All these elements relate to the rationale underlying the logic of ARISE: that intentional focus on and investment in multi-state collaboration are necessary to support the challenging but important work of driving large-scale, regional economic transformation in Appalachia.

Because none of the self-assessment items were rated an average of Low, and just one interviewed partner in Year One expressed substantial concerns about the overall effectiveness of the project in which they were involved, this section should be interpreted as relative opportunities for growth and not descriptions of initiative-level weaknesses.

Governance and Decision-making Structure

Governance and Decision-making Structure relates to how collaborative partnerships manage both day-to-day and strategic decisions about the project. All ARISE projects have a single organization as the lead grantee, but collaboration structures and frameworks vary. Some of the different governance structures in ARISE projects in Year One include:

- A lead grantee coordinates consultants and technical experts, with subrecipients at the region/community level who serve as intermediaries to communities that are

developing infrastructure plans. The lead grantee develops templates and sets expectations for plan content, facilitates collaboration across subrecipients, and follows up on task-related timelines. Intermediaries can provide feedback and make some adjustments to how planning looks with their local communities, but much of the project-level decision-making rests with the lead grantee.

- A lead grantee leads expansion of a workforce model in both the state where the grantee is located and the state to which the model is expanding. They collaborate with state-specific partners to recruit additional implementation partners and carry out the work.
- A lead grantee university has two individuals on staff who each serve as vertical leads of their respective technical workgroups. They each coordinate their workgroup-related partners and contractors to move parallel parts of the project forward simultaneously.
- A lead grantee and one subrecipient serve, effectively, as implementation co-leads in a bi-state project. They each are the primary point of contact for other subrecipients and implementation partners in their respective state. Implementation partners are free (and encouraged) to collaborate across state lines. The lead grantee manages the administrative aspects of the grant, except for initial reporting; the co-lead in the other state manages the collection of reports on behalf of partners in that state and passes them up to the lead grantee.
- A lead grantee's subrecipients are peer organizations in each state. The lead grantee manages the overall timeline and milestones, as well as the administrative aspects of the project, and facilitates collaboration and information sharing, but partners make most of their own day-to-day decisions about how the work is implemented in their state.

A plurality of grantees and partners (44%, n=48) rated their project a 2 for Governance and decision-making: framework is partially implemented. The factors that have contributed to these medium-level ratings include:

- **A lead's single-state mission:** One grantee described how their mission is to be a regional organization covering certain counties in their state alone: "We're a regional organization, we cover 14 counties in [our state]... But realistically, our organization is not really set up to manage... a multi-state effort. And we had virtually no footprint in any other state."
- **Varying internal processes.** One partner described how the varied nature of the types of organizations involved in their project—some of which were nonprofits, some were school districts, some were public agencies—meant that internal decision-making processes were quite different across partners: "There's a lot of partners...[with] the challenge of each of their limitations within their own organizations. We have partners that can't say yes to anything without board approval." Another mentioned the difficulty in establishing formal working agreements. They had difficulty with "legal departments and getting agreement around the language of things like MOUs and clarifying, even to the degree that...that caused some major issues with legal departments...that aren't the people doing the

work, but they have a bad taste in their mouth about the time it took to get this language changed...[T]hat chain of diplomacy that I actually have no control [over]...my financial department and your legal department took longer than you thought it should."

- **The effort and time required to build new relationships.** Some partners on one project felt that the lead's nationwide perspective brought unique value to the project; however, the grantee noted the challenge that their outside status also brings: "Being an outsider is a challenge...[It] has put us at, not a disadvantage at our ability to do work, but a disadvantage to, we're not showing up at the same events, we're not friends with people in the real world, and, not in all cases but some cases, that's been a barrier. We have an extra level of burden to prove ourselves." Another grantee noted that relationship building takes time: "I think it's still in the process, honestly. Our local partners, we've been working with and I'm sure through this grant, will become a closer partnership. For [our state], we're starting to get a little more comfortable with them, but it takes time."
- **An understanding of how a project's many moving pieces fit together.** As one partner noted, "[A]ny grant requires work [to launch]. It started with multiple meetings, and it continues to take us time to build those connections and understand what each of us do, how we do it, and how our own component pieces are supposed to link in a good way but not require all of us to lift all of us at the same time."

It is important to note that 40 respondents rated this item a 3: Governance and decision-making framework fully implemented and functional, while only eight more (48) gave it a 2. In interviews, grantees and partners shared that good governance and decision-making has included high levels of responsiveness, openness to feedback, building on other partners' effective practices for things like data collection instead of reinventing something that is already working, and bringing the right internal stakeholders to the table.

Collaboration Among Partners

Half of the self-assessment respondents (50%, n=55) said that collaboration among partners was a 2: Collaboration is uneven; sometimes functions well, with room for improvement. (40%, however, said it was a 3: Collaboration is highly effective and is meeting its full potential.)

Factors contributing to slower collaboration were similar to those that related to room for improvement in governance and decision-making; in all but two cases, the self-assessment was administered partway into the first year of the project, when much of the startup work was still occurring. Factors that have led to lower-than-desired collaboration included:

- **Startup time.** "Right now [my effort is] just focused on [my state]. I'm looking forward to getting to know a little bit better my cohort on that part in [our partner state] and hopefully being able to put resources together to open it up to businesses in [that state] as well." One lead shared that they are sometimes at the mercy of other organizations' timelines: "The bigger the team you operate with, the more you have to operate under other people's timing. Timing is a dance we've had to play, it's nothing that has crashed the ship or anything, but you just can't force – we can schedule an

event in November, but you can't force people to have the team they're going to have by then."

- **Individualized needs.** One core partner, working with a subset of partners, found that they had to pivot from large-group meetings because partners needed dramatically different things early on: "I thought, oh we'll have group meetings. That doesn't work. All of these people need one-on-one meetings, that's extraordinarily expensive and time consuming...you have to meet and work through it individually to get them to collaborate as a group. And that's been a bit of a challenge, but we learned that very early on." Another grantee had a similar experience: "We had dozens of people that would attend the working group, and then we had two groups..., then we realized that's not the right way. So, I started doing tons of one-on-one or two-on-one, small groups, and just doing deep dives with those people."
- **Virtual collaboration.** Just as some stakeholders spoke about the benefits of in-person collaboration time, others spoke about the challenges of working together virtually: "It's hard to convene a group of people virtually and get really quality engagement where everyone feels like they *can* have input, but they don't *have to*... When you have this multistate effort, you can't meet in person all the time. We wanted to do a summit, but timing, we just couldn't do it. I do wish there was sort of a 'how to' run these projects virtually. They're months long and it's hard to capture people's attention for that long. That's...just the nature of the beast." Another grantee spoke about the necessity of virtual collaboration with large, multi-state projects: "[W]ith 156 counties across five states, it's going to really be a challenge to get people places. We have a tour coming up in a few weeks in [one state], and I would love to have people come from all the regions, but the reality is, who wants to drive seven hours for a two-hour tour?"

Multi-state Impact

One of the core rationales of ARISE is that a multistate approach can enable ARC states acting collectively to realize economic advantages that are greater than the states acting individually. A plurality of grantees (47%, n=53) rated this item a 3: Multi-state collaboration regularly occurs, has obvious impacts greater than any state acting alone, and stakeholders in eight projects rated it the equivalent of High. In interviews, grantees cited specific examples of the benefits of working in a multi-state environment, including:

- **Cross-pollination of ideas that accelerate implementation.** "[T]he multi-state collaboration piece of it is a huge benefit. ...[One employer site] is a year behind the other manufacturing cohorts in their planning and implementation phases, but because of that, they've been able to come onsite to [a more experienced site] and view the school classroom and how the school set that up and how that's changed over the years, talk to the instructors at the school classroom site, and I think that's helped the classroom instructor feel more prepared." As another grantee said, "[I]rrespective of the outcome of the implementation grant, just the activities of the planning grant have connected dots with all six states. So now all six of us are aware of who to go to in the other states."

- **“Pressure-testing” in other implementation environments.** “[A]t the network level, the benefits of doing it multistate, I do think it's an improvement of practices...by being able to hear from...different policy structures, which is a challenge but it's also a benefit...[I]f our model is entirely based on one county's policies or one state's policies, ...it's only replicable in one place. By making it multi-state, we were already policy agnostic, but it further provides us with examples or pressure tests whether this can operate...at a level that is [truly] policy agnostic.”

Multi-state impact, however, received an average rating equivalent to Medium in four projects, and it fell into the bottom three for average ratings in three projects, indicating it is an item to watch. In addition to the difficulties of the governance structure and collaboration, which affect the impact a multi-state design can have, grantees and partners mentioned several factors that have presented challenges to multi-state impact:

- **Varying policy environments.** “The multistate stuff is hard. It's hard to have a clear design that's also super flexible...[since] each state operates in such a different structural, legislative, political, everything landscape. The flexibility and being open to the flexibility, it might not be as neat and cut and packaged, there's got to be a lot of room for variation.” As another grantee said, “One of the differences, we knew this going in, is just the difference in standards and just the way each state's [education] system works....[Our other state] has different standards and even different terms of what they're allowed to do. So, I think state to state, that's been one of the biggest differences.”
- **Varying capacity and experience.** One grantee described how participation and interest was driven, in part, by the size of the ARC region in each state: “[One has] 13 [counties], [another has] 53, ...there's going to be a difference in involvement. The second layer is, [in] three of the states we started with partners being the state chamber of commerce...[W]hat we found was that two of the state chambers of commerce weren't up to the task. Not for lack of wanting to, they just, it was not their thing. [Another state was] a long-term anchor partner. [A fourth] had the treatment partner, great partner but deeply ensconced in that work. [In two states], we have different partners than the chamber going forward for the implementation. [Two additional states] we pulled in toward the end...because of the change in approach the new lead came up with. So, there was different levels of involvement in the different states, but there were obvious reasons why [for each one].”
- **Time to see results.** “I haven't really seen a big difference [from being multi-state]. Maybe down the road; we're just in those beginning stages.”

Feedback and Recommendations for ARC

When asked about recommendations for ARC to continue to improve ARISE, many grantees and partners offered praise to ARC for its communicativeness:

- "[W]riting the actual grant, whenever the group had questions or anything, they always got answers [from ARC]."
- "I do want to say that the ARC reps we've worked with are fantastic. I've worked with lots of federal people, and I love [our project coordinator]...They're very responsive, professional, helpful, all those good things."
- "...[H]aving a person [at ARC] that you can reach out to when the template doesn't speak for itself [during the application process], I would rate that a 10."

Grantees and partners also offered several recommendations to improve ARISE.

Regarding ARC's grantmaking, grantees and partners suggested:

- If granting to an entity outside of Appalachia, ensure partnerships are already established or make a planning grant to establish partnerships, prior to funding an implementation project.
 - "100% I would say this should have started as a planning grant. ...So, show me how this model that you're doing is already working in Appalachia [for an implementation grant], but if it's not, here's a planning grant to figure out how it will. ... I believe in the goodness of ARC. I'm the product of an ARC project, I have a lot of faith in the organization [ARC]. I just wish they would have thought through the optics."
- Continue to make long-term, multi-stage investments toward change.
 - "I'm going to say that the work we have started, even though it has a conclusive end product, is truly the beginning of a longer-term process that is developing in these communities. I ran a large-scale federal grant in the early 2000s...and it was creating behavioral change at a community level...and it was hard and long and high-touch work to do that. We've only started creating the plans for that work to happen."
- Continue to require multi-state partnerships as core to the design of an ARISE project.
 - "I think that the multi-state approach has value [as a requirement]. I think that it's not easy, and it's not for every project, obviously, but I do think that there are opportunities to learn outside of the state boundaries, and so I think that has been, and frankly I'll say that we never would have pursued that had there not been ARISE, so ARISE was a good leverage."
- Highlight the ways ARISE supports and enhances other federal investment.
 - "10 years ago we talked about, how does the ARC leverage the MEP program? I'm really pleased they [ARC] were willing to take this chance with us and demonstrate this model. Down the road I'm hoping someone at MEP [at the federal level] takes notice."

Regarding ARISE grant processes, grantees and partners suggested:

- To the extent appropriate, provide examples and templates as grantee resources.
 - "It was very difficult to find examples of what is a successful grant...[this was] definitely the largest and first federal grant I've written."
 - "I almost felt like it would have been great to have ARC step in from the beginning and say here's a little video, here's something to say this is a messy process, that's OK, we know that, but these are some things you need to know."
- To the extent appropriate, facilitate connections between applicants and those involved in the application review process, to promote information sharing and the flow of the application process.
 - By their multi-state, transformative nature, ARISE projects are typically complex in scope and scale and involve a wide variety of stakeholders across many locations. Grantees expressed an interest in having the ability to "make their case" to decision-makers, for two purposes: first, to help communicate specialized subject matter that may be difficult to get across through other means, and second, to continue to move application processes forward.
- Continue to standardize application components.
 - "I like now that there's a standard form template, that makes it much more clear, and the budget document is standard and clear. The process has become much more clear but it's also quite time-consuming. But I understand the reason for that."
- Consider the potential for projects with multiple co-leads.
 - "For program design, one of the challenges as the non-applicant is that ARISE required a multi-state initiative, but you had to have a lead applicant. I understand why, but there's a lot of [ARC-level] things we're left out of [as the partner]. I think a joint application would be nice, or multiple leads."
- Organize the feedback process in a way that allows for the tracking of revisions and the context behind the feedback and encourage grantees to do the same.
 - "I do feel like, when they were doing their internal reviews, there were a lot of questions coming back and forth, and it was all done via email. I tried to record the emails, create PDFs and put them in our system, but right now if I had to trace those exchanges to be like, *well, they said we could do this, or, we agreed to this*, it might take me a little while to fully put that documentation together. I felt like it was rapid fire back and forth, back and forth, and I was like, *ah, I have to track all this, or I will forget*. I can't rely on my inbox to be the record for [the project history]."

Year One Conclusions

ARISE grantees are making progress on milestones and progress toward results. Eleven have reported progress toward outputs and outcomes, one of which is closed and reported meeting its planned targets. In total, grantees across 11 projects with interim or final results have reported serving about 3,200 people, about 1,250 businesses and organizations, and nearly 500 communities. Collectively they have produced more than 17 plans and created seven programs, in addition to a wide variety of project-related activities and milestone achievements.

Overall, grantees and partners report confidence they will be able to achieve project objectives and produce expected results within the period of performance. So far, grantees have cited adaptability, effectiveness of communication, and a common vision as key accelerators of success. As expected, the multi-state nature of ARISE projects has required additional work on the part of grantees and partners to establish a functional governance structure and facilitate effective cross-state collaboration.

ARC's communication continues to be a strong point. Grantees and partners offered suggestions for small tweaks, and several voiced appreciation for the additional technical assistance and resources available to ARISE applicants, developed throughout Year One.

Appendix A. Projects in Year One Report

Projects included in this Year One Report are listed below by investment priority, followed by a table with data sources.

IMPLEMENTATION	PLANNING
BUILDING APPALACHIA'S INFRASTRUCTURE	
• Appalachian Digital Equity Accelerator (ADEA) (Connect Humanity, MU-21004) • Smart Grid Deployment Consortium and HILLTOP Platform Expansion (Tennessee Tech, MU-21579)	• Appalachian Region Community-Owned Grid Resilient Infrastructure Project (ARCO-GRIP) (Beneficial Electrification League, MU-21557) • Pennsylvania Ohio West Virginia Economic Revitalization (POWER) Network (Carnegie Mellon University, MU-21601)
BUILDING APPALACHIA'S WORKFORCE ECOSYSTEMS	
• Career Acceleration, Readiness, and Employment Experiences for [ARC] Region Students (CAREERS) (Education Alliance, MU-21174) • Twin Tiers ARISE Program (Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission, MU-21391) • Help Our People Expand the EcoSystem (HOPEE) (Community Education Group, MU-21627)	• Setting Appalachia's Workforce on Track to Adapt to the Changing Construction Industry (Industrialized Construction) (Virginia Tech, MU-21172) • Empowerment Collaborative: Increasing Student Empowerment in Appalachian Communities (Mountain State Educational Services Cooperative, MU-21173) • 2023 Connect Appalachia, A Recovery-Friendly Initiative (Upper Cumberland Development District, MU-21348) • Appalachian Cybersecurity Training, Innovation & Opportunity Network ("Appalachian ACTION") (Marshall University Research Corporation, MU-21633) • Appalachian Water Infrastructure Workforce Development and Training Center (University of Kentucky Research Foundation, MU-21650)
BUILDING APPALACHIAN BUSINESSES	
• Manufacturing the New Energy Economy in Appalachia (New Energy Economy Project) (Catalyst Connection, MU-21390)	• Accelerating Forest Farming in Central Appalachia: Strengthening Market Connections and Collaboration for Long-Term Sector Impact and Sustainability (Virginia Tech, MU-21171) • Establishing a Regional Green Building Supply Chain for Upper Appalachia (Green Building Alliance, MU-21347) • Appalachian Sustainable Finance Hub (Steel Valley Authority, MU-21596) • Appalachian Downtown Developers Initiative (Invest Appalachia, MU-21606)
BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY	
(none to date)	• Central Appalachian Network New Era Planning Project (Central Appalachian Network, MU-21506)
BUILDING REGIONAL CULTURE AND TOURISM	
• CTC Equipment Purchase and Trail Improvements (Cumberland Trails Conference, MU-21609-2)	• Mobile Platform Development to Advance Rural Tourism Economies (PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc., MU-21595)

This report includes the following types of data for the following ARISE projects:

Project Number	Progress Update (Metrics)	Progress Report	Self-Assessment	Interview
MU-21004	X	X	X	X
MU-21171		X		
MU-21172		X	X	
MU-21173	X	X	X	X
MU-21174	X	X	X	X
MU-21347	X	X		
MU-21348	X	X	X	X
MU-21390	X	X	X	X
MU-21391	X	X	X	X
MU-21506		X	X	
MU-21557	X (closeout)	X (closeout)		
MU-21579		X		
MU-21595	X	X		
MU-21596	X	X	X	
MU-21601		X	X	
MU-21606		X		
MU-21609-2		X		
MU-21627		X		
MU-21633			X	
MU-21650	X	X		

Appendix B. Grantee & Partner Self-assessment

The ARISE Grantee & Partner Self-Assessment is administered via online survey software and hosted by the ARISE evaluators, Chamberlin/Dunn. Grantees facilitate an email introduction to partners to encourage participation, and ARISE evaluators then distribute the link. Multiple partners from the same organization are permitted to respond. Questions 1 through 14 are randomized. Aggregated, anonymized results are shared with grantees.

1. **Common Vision**

- Early: Vision unclear or uncertain and/or lacks buy-in from all partners.
- Mid: Vision not entirely clear and/or lacks buy-in from some partners.
- High: Vision understood and shared by all partners.

2. **Progress Toward Project Objectives**

- Low: Minimal progress; project is not on track to meet any metrics by grant end.
- Mid: Moderate progress toward reaching all outputs and outcomes of the ARISE project; on track to meet some, but not all, metrics by the grant end.
- High: On track to meet or exceed all outputs and outcomes of the ARISE project.

3. **Partners' Commitment and Engagement**

- Low: Little commitment and engagement of project partners as a group.
- Mid: Some project partners are committed and engaged, but project is missing active engagement from some partners and/or some states.
- High: High levels of active participation from all partners in all partnership states.

4. **Convening/Communication Structure for Collaboration**

- Low: No clear leadership and/or convening structure for project communication and collaboration.
- Mid: Some leadership and framework for communication and collaboration in place, but not fully functional.
- High: Leadership and collaboration framework are clear and function well.

5. **Effectiveness of Communication**

- Low: Poor communication, leading to misunderstandings.
- Mid: Uneven communication.
- High: Effective communication channels and strategies in place.

6. **Effectiveness of Collaboration Among Partners**

- Low: Collaboration ineffective and falling short of potential.
- Mid: Collaboration is uneven; sometimes functions well, with room for improvement.
- High: Collaboration is highly effective and is meeting its full potential.

7. Governance and Decision-making

- Low: Governance and decision-making framework unclear or nonexistent.
- Mid: Governance and decision-making framework is partially implemented.
- High: Governance and decision-making framework fully implemented and functional.

8. Use of Time

- Low: Inefficient use of time.
- Mid: Uneven use of time (sometimes efficient, sometimes not).
- High: Optimal use of time for maximum impact.

9. Resource Allocation

- Low: Inefficient use of resources.
- Mid: Uneven use of resources.
- High: Optimal allocation of resources for maximum impact.

10. Use of Data

- Low: No data to inform strategies and implementation.
- Mid: Some data collected but may be sporadic in quality and/or use.
- High: High-quality data regularly collected, reviewed, and used for strategy formation and decision-making.

11. Adaptability

- Low: Resistant to change and challenges.
- Mid: Some flexibility but some resistance to change.
- High: Flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.

12. Sustainability

- Low: The project (or resulting plan) is unlikely to be sustained.
- Mid: Sustainability is uncertain.
- High: Sustainability plan is in place for long-term impact.

13. Multi-state Impact

- Low: Each state functions in isolation; no benefits from collaborating with other states are evident.
- Mid: Some collaboration occurs but impacts from multi-state collaboration are not obvious.
- High: Multi-state collaboration regularly occurs and results in obvious impacts that would not be seen in a state acting only by itself.

14. Equitable Share of Benefits from Collaboration

- Low: Benefits, so far, tilt heavily toward a small number of partners or states; not in balance with each partner's contributions to date.
- Mid: Benefits somewhat equitable, so far, with room for improvement.
- High: Benefits fully equitable and in balance with each partner's contributions so far.

15. Overall Effectiveness

- Low: The partnership has minimal impact and is ineffective.
- Mid: The partnership is somewhat effective and has some impact.
- High: The partnership is highly effective; there is confidence it will achieve its ARISE objectives and make the intended impact by the end of the period of performance.

Appendix C. Evaluation Limitations

As with any evaluation, this evaluation has several limitations that should be considered when reading and applying this report. Limitations are as follows:

Partial and biased findings

Qualitative and perceptual research and analysis methods are, by nature, partial and biased. To attempt to address this limitation, the evaluation will be triangulating data through multiple sources as available, including grantee reports, the grantee and partner self-assessment, and semi-structured interviews, as well as through post-interview discussions within the evaluation team and with ARC staff. Where grantee partners were interviewed along with grantees themselves, the evaluation team triangulated information collected from these partners and information collected from the grantees. The varying timelines of each project, however, mean that not all data sources are available for all grantees in a given quarter or year.

Selection bias

Selection bias is common in any form of design that does not involve random sampling or random assignment. Grantees are required to participate in the evaluation as a condition of receiving ARISE funds. While this requirement reduces the possibility of non-response, it also introduces the potential for participants to feel pressured to speak favorably about project implementation and the funder (ARC). To try to mitigate this, the evaluation team informed interview participants that their feedback would be confidential in the case of discussing challenges (while challenges may be associated with grant projects, comments would not be associated with individual interview participants) or anonymized in the case of feedback about ARC. Neutral, negative, and sometimes critical feedback from grantees and partners supports the notion that grantees felt comfortable to share their experiences, both positive and negative.

Researcher interview bias

Although a semi-structured interview protocol was used for each interview, it is possible that an individual researcher's methods for asking initial or follow-up questions may have inadvertently introduced bias into responses. To attempt to mitigate this issue, the evaluation team reviewed the interview protocol questions collaboratively prior to conducting any interviews. The same protocol was used for all interviews. The same evaluation team member conducted all interviews, and another team member transcribed them. Notes were shared in a common system, and a separate team member completed quality reviews of all notes and conclusions. Where necessary, evaluation team members met to discuss any issues associated with carrying out the interview protocol and adjust interviewing techniques as needed. In addition, evaluation team members reviewed findings and interpretations collaboratively, as discussed in the next section, researcher extrapolation bias.

Researcher extrapolation bias

Analysis conducted within an interpretative analytical framework is threatened by the fact that researcher interpretation is personal and may go beyond what is present in and supported by actual data. To mitigate researcher extrapolation limitations, the evaluation team individually reviewed and analyzed raw data collected through interviews; identified themes were collaboratively discussed and refined as a team; and evaluators introduced and discussed any contradictory evidence for themes as it arose. However, recommendations and lessons learned that were identified through this evaluation may not be suitable for all ARISE grantees.