

Downtown Revitalization Projects

This document provides specific guidance for **downtown revitalization projects**, per ARC's Strategic Plan Goal 4.1. 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 planning streetscape improvements, creating new signage, renovating historic buildings, and creating new programming. Ultimately, projects aligned with this goal 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 tourism and 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 may 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 plans to explore the potential for linking a community's economic core and an adjacent institution, public land or other significant assets such as colleges or universities, recreational resource or historic entertainment venue
- Restoration of a historic theatre or upgrade to a public space for outdoor markets with the goal of bringing more foot traffic to the 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 and aesthetics, while also providing direct benefit to businesses.
- Business Development Program (i.e. training) that downtown business owners and their staff can participate in.

ARC's Policy for the Development of Travel and Tourism Projects

ARC will support activities as they relate to the travel and tourism industry in the context of an overall development strategy. Grant proposals to use ARC funds for capital improvement or construction related to travel and tourism must meet both of the following criteria:

- Be an integral part of a strategic plan for the community and/or region, **and***
- Meet the highest standards of a cost-benefit analysis and/or feasibility study as to economic outcomes.*

Please refer to ARC's Guidance on Documentation for Travel and Tourism Construction Projects, <https://www.arc.gov/resource/guidance-on-documentation-travel-and-tourism-for-construction-projects/>, as well as ARC's Project Guidelines, <https://www.arc.gov/resource/arc-project-guidelines/>, for more information.

Key Principles of ARC Downtown Revitalization Investments

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

Strategic:

- 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:

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](#).*

- 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.
- Emphasis should be placed on the support of business and property owners and 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. All applicants should refer to ARC's Guide to Performance Measures at <https://www.arc.gov/resource/guide-to-arc-project-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.
- 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.
- Marketing can be a vital component of tourism projects, and activities such as creating a website or installing signage can be designed to meet the key ARC investment principles. However, ARC investment is not well suited for "temporary" marketing activities such as placing billboards, radio/TV spots, brochures and newspaper ads. Many state tourism departments have funding specifically for those promotional activities.
- Applications for projects involving property acquisition must include an MAI (or equivalent) appraisal.

Basic Agency Requirements (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/>.

Grantees are encouraged to reach out directly to their basic agency to ensure the proposed implementation scope and schedule is acceptable to the basic agency prior to submitting the construction grant application.

Additional Resources

- ARC Applicant Resources: <https://www.arc.gov/applicant-resources/>
- Information Specific to ARC States: <https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-states/>
- Appalachia Envisioned Roadshow Stop 3: Building Appalachian Businesses: <https://www.arc.gov/event/stop-3-building-appalachian-businesses/> and Building Appalachian Businesses on Main Street video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWCO_4pL8VM
- USDA Rural Development Strategic Economic and Community Development program: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/strategic-economic-and-community-development>
- 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://mainstreet.org/about/how-we-work/the-main-street-approach>