Request for Proposals:
Evaluation of ARC's Broadband Grants

Questions & Answers
June 27, 2025

Goals of Evaluation

1. Is the evaluation intended to assess grant compliance, program outcomes, and/or community impact?

   A: This is not a compliance review. Through this evaluation, ARC is interested in learning about the impact of our investments and the experiences grantees have had implementing their grants.

2. How does ARC intend to use the results of this program evaluation beyond considering recommendations for programmatic improvements? Who is the intended audience for the work product?

   A: Evaluation audiences include ARC leadership, ARC grants staff, ARC communications staff, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and members of the public. As such, evaluations typically serve multiple purposes, including accountability for use of public funds, helping to document ARC's work and impact, showcasing successes, and making programmatic improvements.

3. Is ARC looking for identification of process improvements for future broadband investments/programs and/or a retrospective evaluation of program performance?

   A: ARC is interested in learning about the impact and implementation of past grants in order to inform future direction for our broadband investments. The final report should include strategic, actionable recommendations for both ARC and the local communities and organizations that are implementing broadband projects related to the following topics:

   - Implementation of broadband grants

- Support provided by ARC to applicants and grantees throughout the grant lifecycle
- Assessing grant performance
- Considerations for future broadband investment

4. To what degree is ARC interested in measuring indirect outcomes of broadband grants beyond impact on grantee beneficiaries, such as outcomes for supplier businesses and spending or other economic activity from increased household income in better-connected communities?

   A: ARC is interested in learning about the economic impact of these grants, to the extent feasible. One evaluation question is "Among businesses who received new or improved broadband service, what economic or other impact have they experienced (e.g., productivity, web presence, business opportunities, investments in technology, etc.)?" We would also be interested in learning about the economic impact from improved/new broadband service in households, to the extent feasible.

5. To what extent should the proposed evaluation methodology incorporate an analysis of each location's policy environment and any relevant constraints? For example, some communities may have experienced delays or limitations due to local policy that wouldn't apply to other communities.

   A: This likely falls under the evaluation questions "What factors influenced projects' successful implementation and sustainability?" and "What challenges/barriers to success did projects face, and how were they addressed?" As such it would be of interest to ARC to include in the evaluation.

Data Provided by ARC

6. We are interested to know if you have a categorical list of projects that will be reviewed (e.g., which are infrastructure and which are digital opportunity).

   A: This evaluation will examine over 80 grants that closed between fiscal years 2019 and 2023. Roughly a quarter of the grants were construction projects funding middle mile or last-mile fiber networks. Around one-third of the grants funded equipment, one-third funded technical assistance/digital opportunity projects, and the remaining grants funded wireless last mile service. ARC will provide the contractor with an Excel file dataset that includes the following:

   - Descriptive information about each grant (e.g., start date, close date, funding amount, strategic plan goal and objective, grant type, purpose, etc.)

- A narrative description of the grant
- Grantee contact information, current as of the close of the grant
- Projected ARC performance measures
- Closeout ARC performance measures

7. What programmatic and/or demographic data has yet to be compiled, such as baseline community demographic data?

    A: ARC will provide grant-level data (See question 6 for a general description of the type of information that will be provided). We will not provide secondary community data, network performance data, current contact information for grantees, or any contact information for grant beneficiaries. (Grantee contact information as of grant closeout will be provided.)

8. Can ARC supply a list of grantees, total project cost, location, description?

    A: This information will be provided once the contract is awarded. See question 6 for a general description of the type of information that will be provided.

9. Are grant plans and reports publicly available online, to enable contractors to understand during the bidding stage what information is included?

    A: Grant information is not publicly available. See question 6 for a general description of the type of information that will be provided once the contract is awarded.

10. Will the Excel file provided by ARC include geospatial data (FCC Fabric BSL IDs or funded area shapefiles, etc.), or is that expected to be newly collected from grantees?

    A: The Excel file will not include geospatial data. This is expected to be newly collected from the grantees, the associated internet service providers, or through external sources as available.

11. The RFP states the evaluator will have view-only access to ARC's grants management database with additional information on grantees; does that access include the ability to download said information for further analyses?

    A: The contractor will have the ability to download information such as pdf reports from ARC's grants management system, but will not have the ability to run queries that might result in downloading an Excel file. ARC will provide an Excel spreadsheet of grants (see question 6 for a general description of the type of

information that will be provided). If further data from the grants management system needs to be added to the spreadsheet, ARC can work with the contractor to provide that information.

12. Have grantees submitted any reports to ARC during this period? If so, were grantees provided with a template to be used? Will the contractor have access to any prior data?

    A: Grantees submit quarterly progress reports while the grant is open, and these are based on a template and are available as pdfs in the grants management system. Grantees also submit a final report, which includes a narrative description of the project and current (as of project close) performance measures. The contractor will have view-only access to the grants management system and will be able to access these pdf reports. The closeout measures and notes will also be included in the Excel file provided to the contractor.

13. To clarify, ARC has contact information for grantees but not any beneficiaries or subcontractors which may have been contracted by the grantee?

    A: Correct, and contact information for grantees is current as of the close of the grant.

14. To what extent does ARC know the reliability of the contact information of the grantees?

    A: Contact information for grantees is current as of the close of the grant. In past evaluations, we have found that there is legwork involved in finding updated contact information for a significant portion of included grants.

Grantee Participation

15. What incentives will the evaluated grantees have to participate in this effort? Should the evaluator anticipate that grantees' interest in securing future funding will motivate them to make a strong case for the value of their projects? Should the evaluator encourage this behavior?

    A: Grantees are informed that the ARC governing Code "requires grantees and subgrantees to cooperate during post-award evaluations of grant outcomes and investment impacts, which may occur several years after project closeout." In practice, we find that there can be hurdles to participation, including outdated contact information and staff turnover. Recently completed evaluations have

achieved survey response rates between 50-70%. Those that achieved higher participation rates have engaged grantees early in the evaluation process and done a lot of legwork to locate updated contact information.

16. We often provide incentives for individuals that participate in interviews and focus groups (e.g., $50 digital Amazon gift card). We were not sure if this was appropriate or allowable to include in the budget for the current proposal considering these are organizations that have already received funding from you.

    A: Offerors may propose a means to encourage responses from grantees and beneficiaries of ARC grants. However, please note that incentive payments funded by ARC may not pose any conflict of interest, and ARC grantees and subgrantees are already required to cooperate with post-award evaluations as a term and condition of receiving an ARC grant or subgrant (ARC Code Section 8.9 – see response to question 15). ARC also cannot provide funding for financial incentives linked to a specific retail establishment. Also note that some grantee organizations may not allow their staff to accept incentives if they are participating in data collection activities during their work hours.

17. What challenges or risks does ARC foresee in delivery of this scope of work? Can you discuss historic levels of responsiveness among grantees?

    A: The RFP includes the requirement that "the proposal should identify any difficulties that may be encountered in this project and propose practical and sound solutions to overcome these difficulties."

    One challenge may involve data quality. ARC has not done a full analysis of the dataset for this evaluation, but we find that with every portfolio of grants, there may be a few cases of missing or difficult-to-interpret data. In addition, our current database has some quirks, such as zeroes that could indicate a true zero or a blank.

    Recently completed evaluations have achieved survey response rates between 50-70%. Those that achieved higher participation rates have engaged grantees early in the evaluation process and done a lot of legwork to locate updated contact information.

18. What is the anticipated process for coordinating outreach to grantees to support their participation in surveys, interviews, or site visits? Will ARC provide introductory communications or endorsements to encourage grantee engagement?

A: Yes, ARC will send introductory communications to past grantees to encourage participation and verify the legitimacy of the requests coming from the contractor. ARC typically relies on the contractor to draft these communications.

Data Collection – Grantee Input, Community Data

19. We wanted to understand what ARC's expectations were for travel to grantee sites (or other sites-would we need to meet in person with ARC staff, provide in-person presentations to stakeholders, etc.).

A: Travel is not a requirement, but travel to grantee sites for data collection is welcome/encouraged, particularly for the case studies. Meetings with ARC staff and the staff presentation can be conducted virtually.

20. Is ARC open to hybrid virtual/in-person case studies or interviews?

A: Yes – see response to question 19.

21. Are in-person site visits expected under this RFP (p. 6–7), or are they optional but encouraged based on feasibility and value?

A: They are optional but encouraged – see response to question 19.

22. For the case studies, does ARC have a list of projects that are already selected, or will this be at the contractor's discretion?

A: The contractor will lead the process for selecting case study sites, in consultation with ARC and based on initial findings from the evaluation.

23. Will ARC select or approve the 10 case study sites, and are there specific states, counties, or grantees it prefers to feature?

A: Sites for case studies will be selected during the evaluation process based on initial evaluation findings. The contractor will suggest sites and ARC will consult on and approve site selection. Generally, we like to see a varied group of project types highlighted in multiple locations throughout the region. In particular, we are interested in highlighting promising practices and/or innovative approaches, particularly in communities that are rural and/or economically distressed.

24. The RFP requires "at least 10 case studies," but doesn't specify selection criteria. Should these be representative of the portfolio's diversity, focus on particularly successful projects, or prioritize rural/economically distressed communities?

A: See responses to questions 22-23.

25. For the 10 required case studies (RFP p. 7), does ARC have preferences regarding project type (e.g., construction, TA, equipment) or geographic distribution?

A: See responses to questions 22-23.

26. How engaged does ARC staff seek to be in this project along the way? For example, do staff want to be deeply involved in the selection of case studies, or with outreach to and conversations with grantees; or would ARC prefer a vendor that is capable of minimizing draws on ARC staff time?

A: ARC staff will engage in regular check-ins with the contractor and will provide feedback on data collection plans/tools and draft deliverables. Prior to outreach from the contractor, ARC staff sends introductory communications to past grantees to encourage participation and verify the legitimacy of the requests coming from the contractor. ARC typically relies on the contractor to draft these communications. We expect case study selection to be guided by the contractor with ARC input.

27. We also have a question about the number of interviews/focus groups that are expected. Do you anticipate we would interview each of the 80 grantees? Do you anticipate one interview/focus group or multiple interviews/focus groups?

A: Neither interviews nor focus groups are a strict requirement, although most of our evaluations do include at least one of these methodologies. If interviews are part of the methodology used, we would not have an expectation that all grantees would be interviewed. Generally, these types of data collection have been used to supplement and/or inform the grantee survey, and are targeted at a sample of grantees. Focus groups and interviews have also been used as a way to gather feedback from select grantee beneficiaries.

28. What is ARC's preferred process for facilitating contact with grant beneficiaries, given that direct contact information is not maintained by the agency? Will ARC provide guidance on any privacy protocols or institutional review requirements for engaging these individuals?

A: Any contact with beneficiaries would be coordinated between grantees and the selected contractor. Past evaluation contractors have gotten feedback from beneficiaries through interviews or focus groups, frequently as part of a site visit.

ARC does not have institutional review requirements, but we can accommodate IRB processes as required by contractors' institutions.

29. Does ARC expect a minimum number of beneficiary responses, or should the contractor propose an appropriate sample based on the methodology outlined in the RFP (p. 6–7)?

A: The contractor can propose an appropriate sample.

30. I would assume that we should anticipate surveying grantees as well. Please let us know if this is an incorrect assumption.

A: Yes, we expect the methodology to include a grantee survey.

31. Should the evaluator try to get in touch with the employers who have reportedly created jobs thanks to the project to help assess the value and scalability of the projects' work?

A: Any information that would help ARC understand the economic impact of our broadband grants would be welcome.

32. The RFP says the final report should include "characteristics of communities that have received new or improved broadband service as a result of an ARC grant." At what level of granularity should these data be compiled? How does ARC define a community?

A: The definition of community can be broad to accommodate different projects, and can include a city, county, or other geographical designation. For this evaluation, it may be appropriate to include secondary community data at the city, county, or census-designated place level.

Data Collection: Real-Time Performance Data

33. Does ARC have a list of Community Anchor Institution types that will be used for this effort?

A: ARC will closely follow the FCC definition in 47 USC 1721 for community anchor institution, which is defined as an entity such as a school, library, health clinic,

health center, hospital or other medical provider, public safety entity, institution of higher education, public housing organization, or community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband service.

34. Which data sets and geo location data would you like us to use. Could this be part of a survey of grantees? Or do you supply the data?

   A: We would like the locations served from the project to be provided through this evaluation. We have a spreadsheet on our website that includes the type of information we now require our grantees to provide, and this is the information we would like to receive about our past grants. See https://www.arc.gov/resource/broadband-grantee-reporting-templates/

35. We are working to determine the amount of resources required within the framework of the broader evaluation to take on real-time network performance measures. Any additional context or scoping information on that front is helpful as we consider a proposal. We are aware of the FCC standard and other baseline info. Examples of past evaluations that have done this to ARC's standard would be helpful.

   A: This could be conducted by having locations served from the project do real-time speed tests and collecting this data or contacting the ISPs and requesting this information as part of the grant performance metrics. For middle mile projects, you will have to contact the ISP leasing the dark fiber and have them provide this type of data. Most of this data will be available from the ISPs that are utilizing the networks.

36. Can ARC clarify if the expectation is to obtain real-time performance data for projects that closed between 2019-2023? Is ARC expecting current field tests or analysis based on grantee-supplied documentation?

   A: ARC would prefer real-time network performance data obtained by the ISP serving the grant award area if possible. If that is not possible, analysis of aggregated data from user-initiated tests through platforms like Ookla, M-Lab, or Speedtest.net would also be acceptable.

37. For last mile projects, is ARC expecting average/typical data or specific BSL service data?

   A: ARC would prefer specific BSL service data.

38. In order to use Fabric IDs as locations, a Tier C license or similar is usually required by CostQuest Associates with consultants being added to the Agency license. Does ARC have a CostQuest license that the consultant can be added to?

A: ARC has a CostQuest License agreement and can work with selected contractor to obtain the sufficient license needed for the evaluation if necessary.

39. What is the expected mechanism for collecting updated network performance data from closed grant?

A: See answer to question 36.

40. For network performance data, will FCC reported data and survey reports from grantees be sufficient, or is there an expectation of third party and/or site validated data?

A: See answer to question 36.

41. Does ARC have a preference between active network testing (where the contractor directly measures speeds) versus aggregating data from user-initiated tests through platforms like Ookla, M-Lab, or Speedtest.net?
   a. Is this testing needed to fulfill FCC reporting, or is it only for evaluation purposes?
   b. If only for the evaluation, we suggest comparable metrics using user-initiated testing could provide comparable data at a lower cost.

A: ARC would prefer real-time performance data if it is available. An analysis of aggregated data from user-initiated tests through platforms like Ookla, M-Lab, or Speedtest.net would also be acceptable. The response should identify the methodology that will be used for data collection. This information will be used for evaluation purposes only.

42. Will ARC provide any existing network performance data from previous monitoring efforts, or will the contractor be responsible for collecting all current performance data from scratch?

A: ARC will not provide any existing network performance data.

43. If using a third-party speed test platform, what level of geographic precision is required to associate tests with specific project areas?

A: ARC requests that the data be associated with the specific service locations within the project area. Either Fabric IDs or latitude/longitude of the BSL should be submitted for last mile network performance data.

44. Should the contractor independently collect the network performance data, or is self-reported data from grantees acceptable?

    A: See answers to questions 36 and 41.

45. Will most grantees have GIS shapefiles or Fabric IDs available, or should the contractor plan to collect this geospatial data directly?

    A: Most grantees will not have the GIS shapefiles or Fabric IDs available. Contractor should plan to obtain this information from the ISP and work with ARC to obtain access to their Fabric license.

Deliverables

46. Will ARC use the case studies and findings for public dissemination, or are these intended solely for internal planning?

    A: Case study briefs/reports will be publicly available.

47. Under "Other Deliverables as Suggested by Contractor," the RFP states that ARC is not interested in the development of public-facing websites or web-based interactive maps. Aside from websites and interactive maps, would ARC be interested in the development of other types of public-facing materials to help communicate evaluation findings and the impact of its grants?

    A: Yes, ARC intends for the evaluation findings to be public and plans to make the final report, executive summary, and case study reports publicly available. We are open to suggestions for other types of materials that would make evaluation findings accessible to the public.

48. Does ARC have preferred types of optional deliverables (e.g., data dashboards, briefs)?

    A: No, but note that for this evaluation, ARC is not interested in the development of public-facing websites or web-based interactive maps.

Role of Local Development Districts (LDDs)

49. Have the local development districts (LDDs) in each of the project areas been working with the subgrantees?

A: ARC does not expect that LDDs have worked with grantees or subgrantees on these specific projects. However, there are several projects in which an LDD is the grantee.

50. Have any of the projects been identified in any LDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?

A: ARC is unaware of any project-specific engagement with the CEDS, but broadband generally is likely included in all of the CEDS.

51. What role will Local Development Districts (LDDs) play in this evaluation, if any? Are they expected to facilitate access or serve as a data source?

A: Some LDDs will be included in the grant portfolio as grantees, and those LDDs would be included as a data source in the same way that other grantees will be included. Other than that, we do not anticipate a role for LDDs in the evaluation.

Contract/RFP Requirements

52. As a university, there are certain terms & conditions we are unable to agree to as it relates to a potential contract; i.e. Warranties and Representations (page 11 of the RFP).
Is it acceptable for the university to either create an Exceptions list to the terms & conditions noted in the RFP and/or redline the RFP itself; Section B. Management Proposal, 4. Contract Agreement Requirements?

A: You may create an exceptions list to the Warranties and Representations included in the RFP and include with your proposal.

53. In the RFP for the Evaluation of ARC's Broadband Grants, in the Allocation of Rights section (pg 22), it references Paragraph G a couple of times and below that it references paragraphs E and F. Can you point to where those paragraphs referenced are contained in the RFP?

A: We apologize for this oversight. "Paragraph G" refers to Paragraph 7 in the RFP, Protection of limited rights data and restricted computer software. "Paragraph E"

is Paragraph 5 in the RFP, Unauthorized marking of data. "Paragraph F" is Paragraph 6 in the RFP, Omitted or incorrect markings.

54. Does ARC anticipate the pricing structure to be GSA, non-GSA, NAICS, SIN, etc.?

A: The pricing structure will be non-GSA.

55. Can current grantees submit a response, or would that make the organization ineligible?

A: Current grantees can submit a response. If doing so, please acknowledge that you are a current grantee in your proposal and provide information about how you would address any potential conflicts of interest during the evaluation.

56. Would being awarded a contract preclude an organization from applying to future grants or contracts within the period of performance?

A: No

57. If an applicant has received prior grants from ARC (outside of the ones being evaluated), would that impact the applicant's eligibility to receive funds for this work? Similarly, would acceptance of this grant preclude an applicant from receiving future grants from ARC for similar work?

A: See responses to questions 55-56.

58. Are you open to awarding the contract to a sole proprietor who would contract with other experts as needed to fully staff this project?

A: Yes, ARC would consider this arrangement.

59. The RFP indicates that the contract is for 12 months, with a possible extension of up to six months. Could you please clarify whether our project timeline should be proposed for 12 months only, or if we are able to structure a plan that spans the full potential 18-month period?

A: Generally, we award one-year contracts for evaluations, but we will consider an 18-month contract period if the proposed scope of work justifies that timeline.

60. Indicates vendors should provide any special requirements to be included in the contract. Can ARC provide a copy of the contract for review? Or should vendors provide a copy of our preferred contract with submission?

A: Please provide any non-standard requirements. A contract will be provided to the selected awardee and there will be a period of contract negotiation prior to award.

61. Can ARC provide the minimum insurance requirements for this contract?

A: Offerors should carry the minimum amount of insurance coverage per generally acceptable business practices.

62. Regarding Section B. 3. Relevant Prior Experience, would ARC consider allowing the previous experience of a respondent's proposed team member to be used as an example demonstrating a recently undertaken similar project?

A: Yes.

63. Should A. Technical Proposal and B. Management Proposal, and C. Cost Proposal be submitted as separate files or one file organized as described?

A: Please submit them together in one combined PDF or Word file.

64. Are additional data-sharing agreements or confidentiality protocols required beyond the protections outlined in the RFP?

A: We expect to add additional data sharing and confidentiality requirements; however, ARC will determine the appropriate requirements in consideration of the selected proposal.