Request for Proposals:
Appalachian Leadership Institute
Q&A

December 19, 2024

Budget

Q: Can you please clarify which travel costs we need to budget for. Is it just for the Key Personnel or do we need to budget travel costs for the 40-member cohort, also? If we need to budget travel for the 40-person cohort is there a minimum or maximum that we need stick to?

A: Offeror budgets should include travel costs for contractor personnel. Travel costs and logistics for the 40-member cohort will be managed and paid by ARC.

Q: Does the ARC have a budget to pay for travel and fees for guest speakers / panel speakers independent of this contract, or should those anticipated costs be included in this scope?

A: ARC will pay for guest speaker travel and associated costs directly. Guest speaker travel and associated costs should not be included in offeror budgets.

Q: Are travel/honorarium costs for guest speakers included in our budget or does ARC cover that?

A: ARC will pay for guest speaker travel and associated costs directly. Guest speaker travel and associated costs should not be included in offeror budgets.

Q: Should we build admission/entry fees for field trips or learning experiences into our budget or is that covered by ARC?

A: No, admission and entry fees for field trips or learning experiences are covered by ARC.

Q: If we are utilizing a strengths-based assessment (Clifton Strengths or a similar format) do we need to include that in our budget?

A: Yes, this cost should be included in offeror budgets.

Q: Should speaker fees for external speakers be included in the proposal budget?

A: ARC will pay for guest speaker travel and associated costs directly. Guest speaker travel and associated costs should not be included in offeror budgets.

Q: In the RFP, ARC states that the 9 training programs will be facilitated in person across the Appalachian region and travel must be included in the price, where does ARC anticipate for each of these courses to be taught?

A: 8 of the sessions will take place in communities across the Appalachian region. One session will take place in Washington, DC.

Curriculum Components & Structure

Q: Are there specific skills they want participants to learn and therefore include in proposals; or is that entirely up to organizations to propose to ARC?

A: The expectation for the program is to provide training to participants in all 5 areas of the ARC Strategic Plan, incorporating both leadership skill building (Area 5) with curriculum that addresses best practices and skill building for the other areas of the ARC Strategic Plan. The offerors should submit their recommendations for skills and components to be included in the curriculum that fit within this framework.

Q: Is the main goal of this program to achieve all 5 strategic areas in this program? Or is it that this program is focused mainly on area 5 and the other areas are primarily met by different initiatives in conjunction with this program?

A: The expectation for the program is to provide training to participants in all 5 areas of the ARC Strategic Plan, incorporating both leadership skill building (Area 5) with curriculum that addresses best practices and skill building for the other areas of the ARC Strategic Plan. The offerors should submit their recommendations for skills and components to be included in the curriculum that fit within this framework.

Q: Do you expect the trainings to equally address all listed examples and concepts in the ARC priorities, or can some focus and emphasis be placed on certain aspects more than others? To use a specific example, does the training need to take an inclusive and expansive view of utilities and infrastructure (power, water/sewer, broadband, renewables development, roads), or could it focus on a subset that more closely aligns with regional and national priorities and/or the expertise of the chosen firm(s)?

A: Due to the limited time available in each session, it is expected that there will be some focus or emphasis placed on certain aspects more than others. To use the example provided, a session on infrastructure could dive more deeply into areas that are regional priorities or have particular emphasis in the host community.

Q: How does the organization define "inclusive" in the context of the strategic goal to strengthen and diversify the region's economy? What factors or identities does this include?

A: Goal 1 of the ARC Strategic Plan is "Building Appalachian Businesses: Strengthen and diversify the Region's economy through inclusive economic development strategies and investments in entrepreneurship and business development." More information about the ARC Strategic Plan can be found here: https://www.arc.gov/investment-priorities/. The full Strategic Plan is available here: https://www.arc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Appalachia-Envisioned-ARC-Strategic-Plan-FY-2022-2026.pdf

Q: Has the community being served been involved in identifying their needs and expectations from leaders? If so, could you share insights or findings to ensure the leadership development programming aligns with those needs?

A: Yes, a needs assessment was done before the program was launched in 2019 and we continue to collect feedback from stakeholders to inform program development. Because the current partner is eligible to submit a proposal as part of this process, ARC will not be releasing this information to protect their intellectual property. We would like to see each offeror's proposals for structure and content they feel is best for a program of this nature.

Q: Will the sessions include all 40 leaders?

A: Yes, the training sessions will include all 40 participants.

Q: What is the target audience for leadership development programs? Will the participation of these courses be limited to volunteers, board members, or is this more likely to include staff at various agencies?

A: The Appalachian Leadership Institute is designed for people who live and/or work in Appalachia and are passionate about helping their communities thrive.

Q: Will the consultant have the opportunity to work with the ARC leadership to design the case studies for the leadership program?

A: Yes, the curriculum partner will work with the ARC on case studies.

Q: What assessments are you considering as a part of the leadership development program?

A: The expectation for the program is to provide training to participants in all 5 areas of the ARC Strategic Plan, incorporating both leadership skill building (Area 5) with curriculum that addresses best practices and skill building for the other areas of the ARC Strategic Plan. The offerors should submit their recommendations for skills and components to be included in the curriculum that fit within this framework.

Q: Will ARC staff have relationships with and be able to connect us to nearby universities and colleges? Or are we expected to already have or build those relationships?

A: ARC does have existing relationships with universities and colleges in the region that can be utilized, as needed.

Q: Would the selection committee consider taking two strong applicants and propose pairing them together to best meet all the needs of the program?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there a specific type of CEU you would like to include?

A: We would like to see each offeror's proposals for structure and content they feel is best for a program of this nature.

Q: Is there a list of core competencies the ARC requires of its leaders?

A: The expectation for the program is to provide training to participants in all 5 areas of the ARC Strategic Plan, incorporating both leadership skill building (Area 5) with curriculum that addresses best practices and skill building for the other areas of the ARC Strategic Plan. The offerors should submit their recommendations for skills and components to be included in the curriculum that fit within this framework.

Q: The RFP states" The proposal must include an outline of the curriculum strategy for the entire year of ALI programming (7 sessions of 3-4 days each), as well as the ALI Alumni Network programming (2 sessions of 2-3 days each). Will there be 21-28 days of training in 7 separate sessions in addition to 4-6 days of Network programming sessions?

A: Yes.

Program Evaluation

Q: Does the ARC have dedicated Monitoring & Evaluation staff who will support the selected organization in designing and executing program evaluations?

A: ARC does have an evaluator on staff who can consult on questions, but it is the expectation that the selected organization will take the lead in designing and executing program evaluations.

Q: Alternatively, is the expectation that the selected organization independently develops and executes a comprehensive Monitoring & Evaluation framework, with minimal direct support from the ARC staff?

A: ARC does have an evaluator on staff who can consult on questions, but is the expectation that the selected organization will take the lead in designing and executing program evaluations

Q: What are the key success metrics for this program, both for participants and the broader community, and how are they evaluated?

A: Measuring the success of this kind of capacity building initiative takes both a short and long-term approach and requires both qualitative and quantitative data.

The baseline question to determine success is "Did the Appalachian Leadership Institute strengthen and enhance the leadership skills of the participants and provide them the necessary guidance to improve organization and local strategies towards economic growth in their communities?"

This is measured through surveys and evaluations of participants' experience and skills while they are in the program, but also through alumni surveys and self-reported information from alumni on the impact in their community through things like partnerships, projects, and grants.

Q: Are there specific improvements or challenges from prior programs that this year's program should address?

A: Because the current partner is eligible to submit a proposal as part of this process, ARC will not be releasing this information to protect their intellectual property. We would like to see each offeror's proposals for structure and content they feel is best for a program of this nature.

Q: What have been the major changes in program structure, outcomes, or participant content over the past two years, and why were those changes implemented?

A: Because the current partner is eligible to submit a proposal as part of this process, ARC will not be releasing this information to protect their intellectual property. We would like to see each offeror's proposals for structure and content they feel is best for a program of this nature.

Q: What aspects of the previous programs from the last two years did participants find most beneficial, and what feedback did they provide about areas they wished were different?

A: Because the current partner is eligible to submit a proposal as part of this process, ARC will not be releasing this information to protect their intellectual property. We would like to see each offeror's proposals for structure and content they feel is best for a program of this nature.

Miscellaneous

Q: In the RFP, "agenda development" is mentioned in the "key roles and responsibilities" for both ARC staff and the selected organization. What will the ideal agenda development relationship look like to ARC?

A: As mentioned on page 3 of the RFP, "the Appalachian Leadership Institute is a collaborative effort between the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Organization that serves as our curriculum partner. The ARC Academies & Institutes Program Manager serves as the lead for ALI planning and direction within the partnership. The selected organization will provide expertise on content and curriculum planning under the leadership and approval of ARC. "

Functionally, this will mean that program development is a collaborative effort between the curriculum partners and ARC, combining ideas for content planning and curriculum with the resources and priorities for the program.

Q: Could you share more about the history of contractors and curriculum development since 2019? Have contractors been engaged for multiple years, and what factors influence contract renewals or changes?

A: ARC hired the existing curriculum partner in 2019 to assist in the development and launch of the Appalachian Leadership Institute. This RFP is part of a regular sourcing process. The current partner is eligible to submit a proposal.

Q: Is there potential for this contract to extend beyond one year?

A: Yes, there is potential that the contract will be renewed past one year.

Q: Does this program cover Strasburg, VA, within the Appalachian Region?

A: Strasburg, VA is not part of the Appalachian Region. See www.arc.gov for a list of counties within the region.

Q: What are the expectations for publicly promoting ALI, including marketing, PR, and social media? Will ARC provide support in these areas?

A: The ARC Communications team will develop all marketing materials, PR toolkits and social media posts and provide these resources to the partner. The expectation is that the curriculum partner will utilize their network to amplify the messaging about ALI to increase the reach of the program.

Q: How should proprietary information and copyrighted intellectual property be documented in our proposal? Would ARC/ALI be able to protect proprietary information and copyrighted intellectual property provided in the proposal?

A: Proprietary information and copyrights should be marked as such in the proposal. ARC will honor copyrighted intellectual property as required by law. Regarding proprietary information, ARC operates under an Open Records Policy (ARC Code Section 4.5), however the information's proprietary nature would be a factor in a decision about whether to withhold the information from disclosure (if requested). ARC would evaluate any request to disclose the information and could commit to inform you if the information is requested.

Q: It appears this program has been led for several years by a partnership including the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and other institutions. Is the ARC actively seeking new partners to create a revised program, or is this RFP an annual/regular sourcing process that may include the incumbent provider as well as other potential new providers?

A: This RFP is part of a regular sourcing process.

Q: Is this opportunity primarily set aside for universities?

A: ARC is looking for the offeror who best responds to the requirements of the RFP.

Q: Is this work set aside for small businesses or open to large businesses as well?

A: This opportunity is open to any size business.

Q: Is there an incumbent currently providing these services?

A: Yes, there is currently an incumbent providing the services.

Q: Is the incumbent eligible to bid?

A: The incumbent is eligible to bid for this opportunity.

Q: Has this upcoming cohort group received any previous leadership training?

A: Each cohort is selected via a competitive application process and is unique. There should be no assumption of previous leadership training.

Q: How are participants selected for the program?

A: Applicants are selected via a competitive application process. More information about this process can be found here: https://www.arc.gov/academies-and-institutes/leadership/how-to-apply/