Local Food Systems Projects

This document provides specific guidance for **local food systems projects** per ARC's Strategic Plan Goals 1 and 2. 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.

ARC investments in **local food systems projects** are diverse in both size and scope and help Appalachian communities create new economic opportunities, spur job creation and entrepreneurship, and the like. Supported projects are often multi-faceted and may involve both construction and non-construction activities, i.e., incorporating a range of business incubation, tourism, and downtown revitalization activities, as well as activities in land acquisition, workforce development and training, as well as technical assistance and other support for new or existing businesses.

While there may be some components of local food systems projects that align with other goals, these projects are generally categorized under Goals 1 or 2 of its strategic plan.

Examples of eligible local food systems projects include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment purchases and/or building renovations for local food hubs, value-added processing facilities, shared-use kitchens, farmers markets, or other related aggregation/distribution facilities
- Equipment purchases and/or building renovations for a university-based agricultural research facility
- Creation of farm incubator programs whose objectives include providing training, business planning, networking, and equipment/land leasing assistance and apprenticeship opportunities
- Youth-focused educational programming for those aspiring to become farmers or enter food-related businesses
- Programs and services in USDA-designated food deserts or those that have been identified as "high-need", including mobile grocery stores or farmers markets that also provide wrap-around healthcare services or vegetable prescription programs
- Agritourism and/or placemaking projects
- Feasibility studies, market analyses, and other such research activities that will determine the viability of a specific project and help create a road map for its implementation

Key Principles of ARC Local Food Systems Investments

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

Strategic:

- Applicants should consider how the proposed scope of work fits into broader regional planning activities and ongoing community and economic development efforts (a great tool for this can be found below under "Additional Resources" by clicking on the ARC Research Report regarding local food and agricultural).
- Applicants should also consider how their efforts can connect to, or leverage, existing local food system development in/around the project service area.

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 by clicking on the appropriate state link.

- Depending on the type of project, applicants should have completed pre-application planning and assessment of the proposed scope of work through efforts including (but not limited to) comprehensive business planning, detailed work plan development, and/or technical assessments or feasibility studies that support project implementation.
- Applicants should also describe the project team's capacity to accomplish the proposed scope of work, its ability to continue the work past the project's period of performance; and its ability to leverage diverse sources of capital.

Collaborative:

- Local food systems projects are often multi-faceted. Applicants should consider convening a diverse group of project partners, including non-traditional stakeholders such as faith-based groups, community schools, local food pantries, or other organizations that support underserved populations, veterans' organizations, retirement communities, and, in some cases, correctional facilities (as local food systems development can provide an opportunity for productive workforce reentry).
- Where possible, applicants should connect with university extension programs, state departments of agriculture, and USDA state offices to ensure that ARC-funded investments are complementary to other state and federal programs (please see additional resources below).

Impactful:

- Performance measures will vary depending on the project's proposed scope of work and scale. While some examples are included below, applicants should refer to ARC's Guide to Performance Measures at https://www.arc.gov/resource/guide-to-arc-project-performance-measures/ for more information on determining appropriate project measures.
- Improvements to food hubs and other processing/aggregation facilities will include businesses served/improved, jobs created, revenues increased, and leveraged private investment (LPI).
- Agricultural training programs are more likely to result in students, workers/trainees, participants and businesses being served/improved.
- Training or programming that leads to business ownership for those aspiring to start a food venture (i.e., business incubator or accelerator program) will likely result in a performance measure of businesses created.
- Local food–related planning and feasibility assessment projects typically result in plans/reports developed or programs implemented.

Other Considerations

- If a project involves purchasing equipment or property, or procuring any third-party services, applicants must follow federal procurement regulations and should have an updated procurement policy that adheres to the stated requirements in 2 C.F.R. 200.317-326 (*Procurement Standards*).
- If a project involves acquiring property, an MAI (or similar) appraisal is needed.

Basic Agency Requirements (For Construction Projects Only)

ARC does not administer any construction projects, including those involving local food systems. 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/grant-resources/
- ARC State Program Managers https://www.arc.gov/state_partner_role/state-program-manager/
- ARC Research Report (2022) https://www.arc.gov/report/agriculture-and-local-food-economies-in-the-appalachian-region/

- USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, College Partners Directory https://www.nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory?state=All&type=Extension
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Toolkit (2016): *The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments, and Choices*
- Agriculture and Local Food Economies in the Appalachian Region (April 2022) https://www.arc.gov/report/agriculture-and-local-food-economies-in-the-appalachian-region/
- EPA Local Foods, Local Places Toolkit (December 2024) https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places-toolkit