

Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Projects

This document provides specific guidance for **natural resources and outdoor recreation projects** per ARC's Strategic Plan Goal 4.3. 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 **natural resources and outdoor recreation** assist Appalachian communities in leveraging the Region's rich environmental resources sustainably for job creation and to diversify local economies. Supported projects can involve a wide range of both construction and non-construction activities, from strategic planning across geographic regions to business development and recreational trail and facility construction.

ARC generally categorizes **natural resources and outdoor recreation asset development activities** under Goal 4 of its strategic plan.

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Developing a comprehensive tourism strategic plan to identify and connect existing assets across regions and municipalities.
- Expanding or improving an existing trail system (e.g., enhancing trail access and trailheads, installing parking areas).
- Conducting market analysis and business planning to assess the financial viability of a tourism-related construction project, such as the number of visitors attracted and dollars spent.
- Developing a tourism-based entrepreneurship training program to improve outdoor recreation-related business and marketing skills.
- Implementing innovative technologies and applications that create new visitor experiences.
- Creating an ecosystem which supports and increases the capacity of local outdoor businesses and communities through shared resources, collective strategic planning and training.

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:

- A. Be an integral part of a strategic plan for the community and/or region, **and**
- B. 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 Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Investments

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

Strategic:

- Tourism projects should be part of a community's overall economic development strategy, integrated into its plan and built on existing community assets. Stand-alone projects without connection to the community's common vision are often not strategic.

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](#).

Sustainable:

- Tourism projects should be designed to become self-sustaining within three years after the ARC grant period is closed. Applicants should consider how the project will maintain consistency and quality after ARC grant funds are used, and how additional public and/or private investment will be leveraged to support the project's continuation.
- Planning should address resource protection and stewardship to preserve assets for future enjoyment by both residents and visitors. This is particularly relevant to natural and outdoor recreation assets.

Collaborative:

- The most successful tourism projects have a broad, extensive support network. Members of the hospitality industry are obvious partners, but tourism projects often straddle multiple sectors or communities and could include representatives of business, local and state government, education and workforce training, and public land management, as well as artisans/crafters and local food entrepreneurs.

Impactful:

- Project impact should be clearly documented to demonstrate the value of the public investment. To track a project's impact, it is critical to establish baseline measurements before conducting any activity. Examples of tourism investment impact measures include businesses or jobs created and new visitor days and overnights. 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.
- ARC prioritizes tourism plans, programs, and products that can result in a measurable economic benefit. A project may be highly desired by a community; however, unless it's designed to attract new visitors, business, or investment, it may not meet ARC's mission. For projects that cannot be directly connected to those outcomes, applicants should be creative in assessing how they would determine whether a project is successful, describing what changes will occur once the project is implemented and how those changes will be measured.

Other Considerations

- 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 natural resources. 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 2: Culture and Tourism <https://www.arc.gov/event/stop-2-culture-and-tourism/>
- Investments in Action <https://www.arc.gov/investment/central-appalachia-expanding-tourism-through-outdoor-recreation/>
- American Trails <https://www.americantrails.org/>