



Appalachian Ohio

Destination Assessment and Strategic Planning Services

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Issued by: Ohio's Appalachian Country, d/b/a Appalachian Ohio

Issued on: February 9, 2026

Deadline: Monday, March 2, 2026



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Deana Clark, Board President
Ohio's Appalachian Country, dba Appalachian Ohio

Dear Prospective Consultant or Firm,

Appalachian Ohio invites proposals from qualified firms or individuals to provide *Destination Assessment and Strategic Planning Services* as part of a federally funded planning initiative focused on strengthening organizational capacity and advancing tourism-driven economic development across Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties.

This engagement is funded in part with federal funds awarded through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) READY Grants to Grow Initiative and must comply with all applicable federal requirements, including 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards).

The selected consultant(s) will work closely with Appalachian Ohio's Board of Directors, membership, and regional partners to develop implementation-ready planning documents that will guide the organization's growth, sustainability, and future regional leadership role.

Proposals must be submitted electronically in PDF format no later than March 2, 2026.

We appreciate your interest in supporting this important work for Appalachian Ohio.

Sincerely,

Deana Clark
Board President

Request for Proposal – Appalachian Ohio Destination Assessment & Strategic Planning Services

1. Introduction

Appalachian Ohio is seeking qualified professional service providers to conduct a Destination Assessment and Organizational Strategic Planning process as part of a competitive procurement conducted in accordance with 2 CFR §200.320(b).

This engagement will support Appalachian Ohio's efforts to strengthen organizational capacity, enhance regional collaboration, and position the Appalachian Ohio visitor economy as a driver of long-term economic vitality.

2. Background

Appalachian Ohio (Ohio's Appalachian Country, dba Appalachian Ohio) is a 501(c)(6) regional tourism association representing tourism organizations, communities, attractions, and industry partners across Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties.

Founded in 1994, the organization has supported the region through marketing, education, networking, and advocacy. Historically operating with a volunteer board and limited staff capacity, Appalachian Ohio is now undertaking a strategic planning effort to strengthen its role as a regional tourism and visitor-economy support organization.

Recent state and federal investments in the Appalachian Ohio region, particularly in downtown revitalization, outdoor recreation, placemaking, and cultural infrastructure, have created a timely opportunity to build organizational capacity and regional coordination.

3. Project Objectives

The objectives of this professional services engagement include:

- Conducting a comprehensive Destination Assessment of Appalachian Ohio's visitor economy
- Developing an organizational strategic plan to strengthen Appalachian Ohio's capacity, sustainability, and regional role
- Engaging regional stakeholders in a structured and inclusive planning process
- Producing implementation-ready deliverables that support future planning and execution
- Ensuring compliance with federal funding requirements and ARC investment priorities

4. Scope of Work

Planning Phases 1 and 2 constitute the base scope of services for this engagement and must be completed within the total ARC planning grant award of \$100,000. Proposals that exceed this amount for Planning Phases 1 and 2 will be considered non-responsive.

A. Planning Phase 1: Destination Assessment

The consultant shall conduct a Destination Assessment to evaluate Appalachian Ohio's tourism assets, visitor experience, and regional tourism ecosystem.

At a minimum, this phase shall include:

- Visitor Experience Audit (unhosted assessment)
- Destination immersion and site visits coordinated with Appalachian Ohio
- Review of existing tourism, economic, and demographic data
- Targeted supplemental research, as needed
- Stakeholder interviews with tourism partners, businesses, nonprofits, elected officials, and residents
- Preparation of a Destination Assessment Report summarizing findings, benchmarks, and opportunities

B. Planning Phase 2: Organizational Strategic Plan

Building on findings from the Destination Assessment, the consultant shall develop an Organizational Strategic Plan for Appalachian Ohio.

The plan shall address, at a minimum:

- Organizational sustainability (governance, funding, staffing)
- Programs and member benefits
- Regional and partner-supportive marketing strategy
- Alignment with tourism-driven economic development objectives
- A roadmap for advancing to future planning and implementation phases

C. Additional Planning Phases (If Funding Capacity Allows)

Planning Phases 1 and 2 constitute the required base scope of services and must be completed within the total ARC READY Grants to Grow planning award of \$100,000.

Planning Phases 3 and 4 may be included within the \$100,000 budget only if sufficient funding capacity remains after fully completing Planning Phases 1 and 2. Appalachian Ohio encourages proposers to identify efficiencies, integrated approaches, or scope optimizations that could allow additional planning phases to be completed within the available funding.

If Planning Phases 3 and 4 cannot be accommodated within the \$100,000 budget, proposers may submit separate, non-binding pricing for those phases for consideration should additional funding become available in the future.

Proposers may submit optional pricing for:

- Planning Phase 3: Visitor Economy Stewardship Plan
- Planning Phase 4: Destination Marketing and Advocacy Plan

Award of contract for additional services is contingent upon funding availability.

5. Deliverables

At a minimum, the consultant shall deliver:

- Destination Assessment Report
- Appalachian Ohio Organizational Strategic Plan
- Executive summaries suitable for board and funder use
- Documentation sufficient to support ARC monitoring, reporting, and grant close-out requirements

6. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must include the following sections, in order:

- A.** Firm or Consultant Overview & Qualifications
- B.** Project Understanding & Technical Approach
- C.** Relevant Experience with Similar or Federally Funded Projects
- D.** Project Team and Roles
- E.** Proposed Timeline and Work Plan
- F.** Cost Proposal (base scope + optional additional planning)
- G.** References (minimum of three)

7. Federal Funding Requirements

This procurement and any resulting contract will comply with:

- 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance)
- Federal conflict-of-interest standards
- Debarment and suspension requirements
- Record retention and access to records provisions

8. Budget Guidelines

- Proposals shall include a not-to-exceed cost for Planning Phases 1 and 2 that does not exceed \$100,000, representing the full ARC READY Grants to Grow planning award for this project.
- Proposers are encouraged to identify opportunities where Planning Phases 3 and/or 4 could be completed within the \$100,000 budget, provided that Planning Phases 1 and 2 are fully addressed.
- If additional planning phases cannot be accommodated within the \$100,000 cap, proposers may submit separate pricing for Planning Phases 3 and 4 for informational purposes and potential future consideration.
- All costs must be reasonable, allowable, and allocable in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by a selection committee composed of members of the Appalachian Ohio Board of Directors using the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Project Understanding & Technical Approach	30
Firm / Consultant Experience & Qualifications	25
Relevant Regional or Federally Funded Experience	15
Timeline & Capacity	10
Cost Reasonableness & Clarity	10
References	10
Total	100

Appalachian Ohio may consider demonstrated efficiency, integration of scope, and the proposer's ability to maximize planning outcomes within the \$100,000 budget as part of the overall evaluation.

10. Submission Instructions

Submit proposals electronically in PDF format to:

Chandler Grooms

Board Member, READY Grant Manager

Appalachian Ohio

chandler.grooms@cityofwaverly.net

Proposal Deadline: **Monday, March 2, 2026**

All questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing via email to the same contact above.

11. Conditions and Reservations

Appalachian Ohio reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, waive minor irregularities, negotiate with one or more respondents, or cancel this RFP at any time. This RFP does not obligate Appalachian Ohio to award a contract or reimburse any proposal preparation costs.