

APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY CAPITAL

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PROGRAM SPONSORS



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (“RFP”) FOR OPPORTUNITY APPALACHIA PROJECT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Project Sponsor: Mountain Empire Community College Foundation, Big Stone Gap, VA

Project Name: Mountain Empire Community College Outdoor Amphitheater (Project Summary provided in Attachment B.)

Release Date: August 15, 2022
Proposal Due Date: September 12, 2022
Selection Date: September 20, 2022
Contract Period: September 20, 2022 – February 28, 2023 (or later)

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Technical Assistance for Opportunity Appalachia Projects

I. Overview of Request for Proposals

Appalachian Community Capital (ACC) seeks contractual support for specified Technical Assistance for real estate project development.

The Technical Assistance contractor will report to the Program Manager of Opportunity Appalachia. The requested Scope of Services is noted in Attachment A, and may involve:

- Architectural and engineering,
- Market research/demand assessment,
- Development of investment prospectus, preparation of pro forma financial projections, structuring of projecting financing,
- Feasibility assessment,
- Identification of project developers and/or business operators,
- Investor outreach for project finance/investment,
- And other types of support.

Entities interested in providing Technical Assistance must complete the Request for Qualifications RFQ, as noted on the [Opportunity Appalachia](#) webpage and found [here](#). Proposals will be evaluated on contractors' qualifications (per the RFQ), expertise, track record, Scope of Work, budget/timeline, and other project requests.

II. About Opportunity Appalachia

[Opportunity Appalachia](#) will provide technical assistance to develop and structure investable transactions, and it will create investment prospectuses and pitch decks that will be used to bring investment to rural and downtown communities. Investment priorities include projects focusing on downtown development, manufacturing, IT, healthcare, education, food systems, clean energy, heritage tourism, and recreation.

The program recently announced selection of 34 projects to participate in the program to bring jobs, business support, and investment to Central Appalachia. The selected projects propose to create over 1,600 permanent and 190 construction jobs and attract over \$177M in financing to develop textile manufacturing facilities; downtown development; community centers; health, wellness, and childcare centers; food and agricultural facilities; hotels; and retail enterprises in downtown and rural areas across Central Appalachia.

These proposed projects are signals of the growing investment potential in our rural and downtown communities in Central Appalachia. Opportunity Appalachia will work closely with private investors, banks, Community Development Financial Institutions, New Markets Tax Credits investors, Historic Tax Credit Investors, and Federal agencies to highlight participating communities and access financing for transactions.

Once project technical assistance is completed, a highly visible Investor Convening event will be held in early 2023 that will target both local and pre-vetted national investors, as well as federal and state funders. A curated web-based platform hosting prospectus / pitch decks will also be made available to facilitate investor due diligence.

The program is supported by the Appalachian Regional Commission, the US Department of Treasury CDFI Fund, Truist, Goldman Sachs, and the Dogwood Health Trust.

III. About the Appalachian Region

The Appalachian Region, as defined in ARC's authorizing legislation, is a 205,000 square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population.

The Appalachian Region's economy, which was once highly dependent on extractive industries, has become more diversified in recent times and now includes larger shares of manufacturing and professional services, among other industries. Appalachia has made significant progress over the past five decades: its poverty rate, which was 31 percent in 1960, had fallen to 16.3 percent over the 2013– 2017 period. The number of high-poverty counties in the Region (those with poverty rates more than 1.5 times the U.S. average) declined from 295 in 1960 to 98 over the 2013–2017 period.

These gains have transformed the Region from one of widespread poverty to one of economic contrasts: some communities have successfully diversified their economies, while others still require basic infrastructure such as roads, clinics, and water and wastewater systems. The contrasts are not surprising considering the Region's size and diversity—the Region extends more than 1,000 miles from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi, and it is home to more than 25 million people.

Target geography

Central Appalachia – North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia



IV. Project Timeline

It is anticipated that the contractor will be selected by September 20, 2022 for an estimated contract start date of September 20, 2022 through February 28, 2023.

V. Instructions to Submit a Proposal

Contractors seeking to provide the full suite of TA services should submit the items listed below. It is expected that one proposal should include all requested services, which may mean that multiple entities are providing services, with one identified lead contractor.

- Scope of Work (max 3 pages) describing proposed activities to be undertaken as requested in Attachment A, with identified staffing (lead and support) for each work element.
- Budget that defines deliverables, rates and proposed payment schedule including indirect costs. A Not to Exceed cost for the full engagement must be provided; costs not to exceed \$75,000. Payment Schedule to be based on deliverables / outcome milestones.
- Timeline for Scope of Work, with deliverable milestones.
- Biography/resume for all staff noted in proposal (or provided in RFQ response).
- References from current or prior clients, including name, title, organization, contact information, and a brief description of the relevant work performed (or provided in RFQ response).

Please submit responses via email in one pdf attachment by Proposal Due Date to Kathryn Coulter Rhodes oa@acc1.org.

VI. Proposal Evaluation

ACC will select contractors through a competitive process based on the following criteria.

- Qualifications (per those provided in the RFQ), expertise, track record, and staff bios.
- Scope of Work and Timeline
- Budget
- Requests from project sponsors

Attachment A

Requested Scope of Services

Project Sponsor: Mountain Empire Community College Foundation

Project Name: Mountain Empire Community College Outdoor Amphitheater

Project Summary provided in Attachment B.

TA Requested

- Architectural and Engineering for conceptual design, drawings, and cost estimates for the outdoor amphitheater and ancillary structures, incorporation of solar and green building design where possible. Design process to include engagement meeting(s) with 5-10 community leaders.
- Financial Structuring of the transaction
- Development of loan / financing package, to include financial projections and pro forma

Note: The architectural and engineering firm must be registered with the State of Virginia. [Click here](#) for a list of approved firms, and [click here](#) to register as a vendor through eVA.

Attachment B

Summary Information

Lead Contact: Amy Greear

Applicant Organization: Mountain Empire Community College Foundation

Address: 3441 Mountain Empire Road, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Phone: (276) 523-7480

Email: agreear@mecc.edu

Community Information

1. Communities targeted by this application (municipality(ies), county(ies), and census tract(s):
Note: See Appendix I for a list of eligible counties.

Mountain Empire Community College is located on U.S. Route 23, in Big Stone Gap, Wise County, Virginia (Census Tract 9312), where this project will serve audiences of students, faculty, staff, community members, and visitors to the southwest Virginia region. The college's service region includes one city (Norton) and four counties (Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise) in rural southwestern Virginia, with a population of approximately 103,000. This project expands beyond the College's service region and will provide educational and cultural events to thousands of individuals, improving the overall quality of life for those in Southwest Virginia, as well as visitors from northeast Tennessee, southeast Kentucky and beyond.

2. Service area of applicant (note if different than above, or note same): The college serves a region that covers Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties as well as the city of Norton in Southwest Virginia. With a service region that borders the Tennessee and Kentucky lines, MECC also serves students and visitors from the northeast Tennessee Tri-Cities area, as well as the multiple counties in southeast Kentucky.
3. Community Development Strategy(ies): The economic impact of heritage tourism to the Virginia economy is well documented; however, for Southwest Virginia, the true benefits of its beauty, culture and talent are often hidden within the mountainous terrain of this region. As reported in a study conducted by the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis at Virginia Commonwealth University (2017), heritage tourism in this region is "primarily centered upon the culture of country music...and skilled crafts" that are marketed through the Crooked Road and Round the Mountain initiatives. Yet, for those native to this region, the distinct sounds of its music are that of "mountain" or "old time" music, a mixture of string-bands and folklore that pre-date bluegrass and country music of today. Throughout its 50-year history, MECC has worked to preserve the heritage in this region through its cultural programming, including an academic program in old-time music, its annual Home Craft Days festival featuring musicians, artists, crafters, authors, and food vendors from all around the region, an annual Mountain Music School summer program that teaches students aged 10 and up the basics of how to play a wide variety of traditional Appalachian musical instruments, and small productions by organizations such as Pro-Art and the Crooked Road. However, the College's ability to host large events to highlight the cultural heritage of southwest Virginia is limited due to the 400-seating capacity of its current facility, the Goodloe Center. Even its annual Mountain Music School has outgrown the current facility, where students who would normally be on-stage for the final performances now overflow into the audience to perform the finale. To further support the cultural heritage of this region, Mountain Empire Community College is committed to developing a 1000-seat outdoor amphitheater on-campus to meet the demand for event space and permanent infrastructure, to improve educational opportunities for students and the community, and to improve quality of life and economic impact for the entire service region. As proposed, the MECC Amphitheater will bring educational

and cultural events to thousands of individuals throughout the region, and improve the overall quality of life for Southwest Virginia. Construction of this facility will more than double the maximum capacity in MECC's current meeting space, and will meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design requirements.

Project Information

4. Proposed Projects (list up to 3):

- I. **Name of Project, address:** Mountain Empire Community College Outdoor Amphitheater, 3441 Mountain Empire Road, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219
 - **Size in Sq Ft.:** 25,000
 - **Total anticipated financing need \$:** 2,000,000
 - **Financing identified/anticipated, list source and dollar amount or note 'None':**

The institutional commitment of MECC to this project can be seen both in making it a central part of the College's Master Plan and by the MECC Foundation choosing to include the MECC amphitheater as a priority for funding in the 50th Anniversary Fundraising Plan. This plan has set a goal to raise \$2M in funding through special events, fundraising campaigns, and grant opportunities. Thus far, MECC has raised approximately \$1.7M toward its \$2M goal. In 2021, the Slemp Foundation pledged \$1.5 Million in funding for the amphitheater project, to be distributed over a four-year period. The Slemp Foundation has requested that MECC provide a \$500,000 fundraising match for this gift. MECC kicked off its 50th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign by announcing this major gift and project. Staff and community members have pledged at least \$50,000 toward the \$500,000 required Slemp Foundation Match. Additional fundraising will be ongoing throughout the 50th Anniversary of the college and beyond, with a goal to raise \$3M in total funds to support the amphitheater project. The MECC Foundation plans to sell brick pavers for the walkways to the amphitheater. MECC will host a 50th Anniversary Gala in October 2022 with the Amphitheater as a primary fundraising opportunity. In addition, MECC plans to support technology purchases for sound and lighting equipment through available state funding.
 - **Project description (include url link if available):**

Mountain Empire Community College, one of twenty-three regionally accredited two-year colleges in the Virginia Community College System, has been heavily involved in preserving the history and culture of this region throughout its 50-years of operation. While hosting a variety of events on-campus each year dedicated to this purpose, opportunities to meet the increased interest in heritage tourism events have been constrained by a lack of space and resources. Furthermore, the College has had to reduce its educational offerings in the performing arts due in part to the lack of facilities. With only one stage on-campus in the Goodloe Center, a multipurpose meeting space that is used by both the college and the general public on a frequent basis, conflicts often prevented the practice or production of theater and music productions. With limited staging options and inadequate seating, the College's only public venue no longer meets the current needs of the college and the community it serves. MECC's educational programming, along with its annual Home Craft Days festival and summer Mountain Music School will see immediate benefits from the addition of a large outdoor venue. Currently the College has to erect temporary staging and seating areas in parking lots to accommodate larger events, often costing more than \$50,000 for the rental of tents, staging and seating per event. A larger, more permanent solution is needed. Therefore, MECC is committed to developing a 1000-seat outdoor amphitheater on campus to meet the demand for

event space and permanent infrastructure, to improve educational opportunities for students and the community, and to improve quality of life and economic impact for the entire service region.

- **Community Impact (quantify / provide estimates):**

As proposed, the MECC Amphitheater, with professional lighting and state-of-the-art sound equipment, along with the larger stage and unique open-air presentation, will attract more performers to campus. Partnerships with organizations such as the Town of Big Stone Gap, Crooked Road, and Pro-Art will bring events to Big Stone Gap which were never possible before, providing new entertainment to the service region, creating tourism dollars to the town, and attracting new audiences to the College. In the long-term, MECC will be able to extend its reach to an audience of tens of thousands more each year than ever before.

An example of the need for a larger facility in the region was evident when the Town of Big Stone Gap approached MECC to serve as a host venue for the kick-off concert for its Blue Highway Festival in 2022. This festival is expected to sell 7,500 tickets, with thousands of visitors to the region anticipated. Projected revenue from this event, in ticket sales, lodging, restaurants, and other services, will serve as a tremendous economic boost for the town and Wise County. While MECC is pleased to host this event, its current facilities will only accommodate 400 attendees for the concert. A larger outdoor venue is needed to support the future demands for this festival, with the Town of Big Stone Gap asking for the college continue to serve as a venue partner when the amphitheater is constructed. The potential future economic benefit to the region with the Blue Highway Festival is immeasurable.

As another example, the Pro-Art Association has provided cultural and humanities events to the region of Southwest Virginia since 1976 in the form of live music, dance, acrobatics, and drama. The Executive Director of this organization has indicated great excitement for the project, stating the amphitheater would fill a substantial need in the region. A partnership with Pro-Art also brings in their extended partners who depend on Pro-Art to secure venues in the local area. Examples of these include the Bulgarian State Opera, Symphony of the Mountains, the American Shakespeare Center, the Barter Theater Players, the Richmond Ballet, and the Great Chinese Acrobats among many others. Pro-Art estimates hosting between six to eight performances at the MECC amphitheater each year. These are events that do not normally come to Big Stone Gap and likely will never do so without the addition of a large outdoor venue. Direct jobs: 4+ and additional follow-on from capacity to hold large events.

- **Name(s) of project sponsors, developer, and/or business owner, if identified:**

Mountain Empire Community College, an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, is the project developer of the proposed amphitheater. The College assets include approximately 184,000 square feet of space in seven buildings that are located on 88 acres in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. It is a two-year, public community college which serves approximately 3,000 credit students (1,500 FTE) and 2,600 noncredit students each year. As one of 23 community colleges within the Virginia Community College System, the college began operations in 1972. Its mission is to provide our region with accessible, quality higher education, workforce training, and community programs to ensure an educated population and globally competitive workforce.

- **Technical Assistance Needed:**

Mountain Empire Community College seeks technical assistance to develop engineering and architectural designs of the proposed amphitheater and ancillary structures.

- **Describe the connection to other proposed projects listed on this form (if applicable):** N/A

5. **Clean Energy Focus:** MECC has long been involved in the development of an educated workforce to support clean energy efforts within the region. Through its Energy Technology program, MECC developed the VCCS' first mobile solar-powered energy system (SPARC-E – Solar Powered Alternative Renewable Clean Energy) that has been used since 2016 to provide electricity to events on- campus such as the Home Craft Days festival, graduation activities and more. The College also has an array of solar panels and a wind turbine that are utilized to power LED lighting in the College's parking lots, and a robust training program in alternative energy solutions. Most recently, the college became involved in an innovative partnership with Secure Futures to provide commercial-scale solar installations for businesses, nonprofits and local governments in the seven-county region of southwest Virginia which have been impacted by the decline in coal production over the past decade. As a result, the College hopes to incorporate this project into its plans to erect the amphitheater, and will work to either include solar installation in the design of the facility or continue to utilize its mobile unit as a source of alternative energy to the facility.
6. **Applicant Capacity:** What is the relationship of the applicant to the community? How has the community demonstrated its support of the project(s)? Describe the applicant's role and capacity for completing or overseeing project activities: Mountain Empire Community College has the capacity to effectively carry out the scope of work as proposed in this project. The College will coordinate project activities and will implement multiple methods to continuously monitor its progress. The college has extensive experience managing grant awards of all sizes, including large, multi-year federal grants, and those associated with construction and renovation of its facilities. Adequate controls are in place to ensure sound financial management. As a part of this rural community, MECC has the interest, experience and drive to address the identified need. The proposed amphitheater will create a unique space for outdoor events that will be unrivaled in Southwest Virginia. The result will provide improved student and community facilities, heightened quality of life through art and cultural event offerings, and new economic development opportunities that will support regional growth and a robust, diverse economy.