



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PROGRAM SPONSORS



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

Project Sponsor: West Marion Community Forum Inc., Marion, NC

Project Name: West Marion Inc & Alphonso Hardy Technology Collaborative (Project Summary provided in Attachment B.)

Release Date: July 19, 2024
Proposal Due Date: August 16, 2024
Selection Date: August 30, 2024
Contract Period: August 30, 2024 – February 28, 2025 (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](#) TA provider webpage. 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 8 projects to participate in the program to bring jobs, business support, and investment to Central Appalachia. The selected projects propose to create over 280 jobs and attract over \$27M in financing to develop and expand food business hubs; outdoor recreation; childcare centers; regional airport facilities; and hotels; in downtown and rural areas across East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

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.

As project technical assistance is completed, investor connections will be made between projects and 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, Dogwood Health Trust, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, US Bank, and M&T Bank.

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 – Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia



IV. Project Timeline

It is anticipated that the contractor will be selected by August 30, 2024 for an estimated contract start date of August 30, 2024 through February 28, 2025.

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 \$70,000**. Payment Schedule to be based on deliverables / outcome milestones.
 - *Please note:* to reduce administrative burdens and management costs, OA requires a maximum of 3 invoices per contract (the first may be a retainer/deposit totaling no more than ~20% of the contracted amount. Payments are made based upon satisfactory completion of deliverables and approval by the project sponsor.
- 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 with anticipated deliverable and associated invoicing schedule
- Requests from project sponsors

Attachment A

Requested Scope of Services

Project Sponsor: West Marion Community Forum Inc.

Project Name: West Marion Inc & Alphonso Hardy Technology Collaborative

Project Description: Former pre-integration school for the Black community to transform into an inclusive multi-racial community center housing local nonprofits and businesses, a community kitchen, health clinic, and technology center supporting Marion's BIPOC community. The minority-led project sponsor estimates costs to total \$10 M with creation of 48 jobs.

Full project summary provided in Attachment B.

TA Requested

- Market study and business/operations planning support for the various identified uses (see Attachment B, page 9 for full list of uses)
- Financial structuring and financial proforma development, including review of suitability for New Markets Tax Credits
- Development of project prospectus and capital raise support with expertise in New Markets Tax Credits (if pursuing). Note: capital raise support proposals that are success-fee based are also eligible for submission and are negotiated in a separate contract with the project sponsor, if desired.
- Solicitation and identification of developer and/or business operators
- Owner's representation / project support. Note: a proposed number of hours at a specified billing rate can be proposed. Additional hours required beyond the Opportunity Appalachia contract can be negotiated in a separate contract with the project sponsor, if desired.

Attachment B

Summary Information

Lead Contact: Paula Swepson Avery

Applicant Organization: West Marion Community Forum Inc.

Address: 220 West Grayson Street, Marion NC 28752

Phone: (828) 442-7366 (o); (828) 317-9729 (m)

Email: Paula@westmarion.org

Community Information

1. **Communities targeted by this application (municipality(ies), county(ies), and census tract(s)):**

West Marion Inc. is a Black-led nonprofit located in McDowell County, NC, Census Tract 9709.01. This county is classified as a Transitional County by the Appalachian Regional Commission and a Tier 2 Distressed County by the NC Department of Commerce. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 14.5% of McDowell County residents live below the poverty level. Annual median income disparities by race and ethnicity include: White is \$48,092, Hispanic is \$41,229, and African American is \$33,938. In terms of the economic impact on children, 23.2% live below the poverty line, 68% of school age children qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 19.8% of children are food insecure. This data highlights the need for our project which aims to turn the curve on these challenges and promote equitable changes to improve the livelihoods of our children, families, community members, and county as a whole. To advance our goals, West Marion is leading racial equity conversations that are bringing visibility to the economic needs, priorities, and assets of Black and Brown communities in our region.

The West Marion neighborhood has suffered from unjust policies related to housing discrimination, urban renewal, and racial segregation. These policies resulted in the closing of our beloved school “Hudgins/Mountain View School” and the construction of a major highway that divided the heart of our community. We were promised by the Department of Transportation that a bridge would be built to keep our communities connected, but this promise was never fulfilled. We’ve had to rebuild Black-owned businesses and Black-owned homes/communities that were destroyed because of these unjust policies. In 2016, we facilitated a series of community forums that brought together grassroots and traditional leaders to discuss the strengths and challenges in our community. These meetings rebuilt a sense of pride in our community, developed a pipeline for new and diverse grassroots leadership to emerge across our city and county, and generated new investments into our community priorities related to health equity, housing, transportation, and food insecurity. From these meetings, we launched our nonprofit, West Marion Inc, and spread our community engagement model to other structurally excluded neighborhoods to organize and mobilize residents to create shared visions and action plans for community centered development. We are now a thriving nonprofit that is leading the way on policy changes in our region.

2. **Service area of applicant (note if different than above, or note same):** Most recently, an exciting opportunity has emerged where we have been offered the land and building that once housed our “Hudgins/Mountain View School” as a donation to our nonprofit. This is an incredible opportunity to right the wrongs of the past, build a community center to honor our ancestors, create a long-term home for our nonprofit, create living wage jobs for our residents, and showcase the strength, leadership, and resiliency of rural Black and Brown communities. As part of this effort, we will also advocate for the Department of Transportation to build the bridge that they promised 35 years ago and reconnect our communities and create a pathway to our community center.

In terms of economic development – McDowell County is experiencing tremendous growth through increased tourism, micro-breweries, arts and placemaking projects, and the development of new trails, including the Fonta Flora State Trail, and up to 30 new miles of outdoor and recreation trails created by the G5 Collective in Old Fort. In addition, new housing developments and a new workforce development campus is underway. While these opportunities have the potential to reshape McDowell County in exciting ways, these efforts could also result in economic development initiatives that displaces and excludes low-income residents and communities of color who have lived here for generations.

The purpose of our nonprofit is to elevate the voices of structurally excluded communities to capitalize on these emerging opportunities and share local solutions that reduce disparities related to complex health, social, and economic challenges. Notably, over the past 7 years, our nonprofit has raised over 7 million dollars from public and private foundations for rural community engagement and grassroots movement building initiatives. We have hosted over 200 community forums, bringing in residents to discuss issues like housing, immigration, racial equity, health equity, economic justice, and community policing. We have led rural placemaking activities, which includes creating a community mural that brings visibility to Black history and local efforts to desegregate schools in Old Fort, NC. In terms of community economic development, we helped diversify the Growing Entrepreneurs program to include BIPOC business leaders and facilitated a collaborative to prioritize inclusive economic development projects that generate locally owned wealth for people of color in Old Fort.

3. **Community Development Strategy(ies):** Strategies: IT, healthcare, education, food systems, heritage tourism, recreation, and downtown development.

The below partners have committed to helping us develop our vision for repurposing a million dollar property that was donated to our nonprofit and creating a multi-racial community center in the heart of downtown Marion, NC.

- NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ): They are providing us with expertise and resources for Phase 1 and Phase 2 environmental studies and brownfield studies.
- Southern Economic Advancement Project: They are providing us with grant writing support to leverage federal grant opportunities, such as the EPA’s Community Change Grants.
- City of Marion, Marion City Council They are connecting us to resources and integrating comprehensive community development plans with the vision for our building and the Drexel Heritage at Marion Station.
- Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Rural Investment Collaborative: They are supporting us to develop a pitch of our project for potential investors, learn about investment opportunities to build our community center, leverage our connections with local, regional, and national foundations, and increase our knowledge of investments and capital options.
- NC Rural Center: They are connecting us to state policymakers to support investment and partnership’s coalescing around our project goals.
- Representative Dudley Greene at the NC General Assembly, District 85: His office has offered to support our project at the state level.
- Funding Partners: The following funders have dedicated multi-year investments into our programs - Dogwood Health Trust, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina Foundation, and State Employees Credit Union.
- Foothills Food Hub and McDowell Local Food Advisory Council: They are partnering with us to support our commercial kitchen and food distributions.

- NC Center for Health and Wellness and Culture of Results Initiative: TA related to facilitation, evaluation, and data collection for our programs.
- Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation: Partnership and expertise related to project development and business development.
- Equitable Community Strategies: TA related to fundraising, advocacy, community engagement, and strategic planning.
- Grassroots Community Partners: West Marion Community Forum, People on the Move for Old Fort, McDowell Racial Equity Collaborative, McDowell Access to Care and Health, NAACP

Project Information

4. Proposed Projects (list up to 3):

- I. **Name of Project, address:** We plan to name the building “West Marion Inc & Alphonso Hardy Technology Collaborative”. We are naming the building after our nonprofit and a local Black elder who worked at this building for over 50 years under different owners. The building has been donated to us by McDowell Millwood LLC at the direction of the Mayor of Marion who connected the owners to us due to this historical significance of the building, which once housed the Black community’s beloved school, “Hudgins/Mountain View School,” where many of our elders went to school before integration in the 1960’s. This is an incredible opportunity to bring visibility to our community in the heart of downtown Marion and build a legacy for generations to come.

The address for the location is: 148 Hudgins Street, Marion NC 28752

We are eager to partner with Opportunity Appalachia to leverage your expertise and variety of technical assistance offerings to develop our investment prospectus, prepare our pro forma financial projections, structure our project financing, identify project developers, conduct a feasibility assessment, and conduct outreach for project finance/investment, and prepare architectural and engineering assessments.

Notably, this opportunity connects to another exciting Black-led community development project that is underway in Old Fort with our partners, Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation’s Innovation Hub, which will offer a commercial facility, featuring a state-of-the-art film studio, commissary kitchen, meeting space, and a manufacturing facility. It is also connected to our partners at the Grier Village, located in Old Fort, NC. We partner with Stephanie Twitty, CEO of EMSDC and Jason McDougald, Executive Director of Camp Grier to connect and build upon all of these efforts to ensure inclusive community development for residents and entrepreneurs of color through co-facilitation of the Old Fort Economic Development Collaborative, where we bring community leaders together to actively participate in designing and developing wealth creation strategies that lead to an equitable and inclusive community for all. Our role is to facilitate a space for learning, education, and relationship building to support economic, social, and environmental justice in Old Fort. This project will expand our economic development efforts from Old Fort into Marion with the goal of repurposing our newly acquired building.

- **Size in Sq Ft.:** ~20,000 sq. ft. and 3.15 acres
- **Total anticipated Project Cost \$:** \$8MM - \$10MM
- **Financing identified/anticipated, list source and dollar amount or note ‘None’:** We have established the West Marion Inc. Legacy Fund – currently has \$25,000 donated from Marion CDC and West Marion to support development projects for low income and minority communities in McDowell County, NC. In addition, the building and land was donated to us at a tax value of 1.09 million dollars and the transfer by gift of real estate was signed on April 9, 2024. Lastly, we have secured \$1,702,200 in funding to support our programs over the next three years and have been

invited to apply for an additional \$2,400,001 in funding from our funding partners. This reflects a total of \$4,102,201 in secured/pending funding commitments for our programming.

- **Project description:** Our participation in Opportunity Appalachia is critical to advance our community vision to bring together a diverse group of partners to repurpose a building that was donated to our nonprofit into a community hub where our people can take control of their economic futures by starting locally owned businesses, accessing workforce development programs geared toward high paying jobs, accessing quality and culturally aligned childcare programs that complement our workforce needs, accessing culturally appropriate healthcare services, accessing recreational opportunities, as well as, other programs that support the health and economic priorities of people of color in our region.

Our community-led vision is to create a thriving and inclusive multi-racial community center that features:

- A co-working space for our staff and other nonprofits/businesses/social enterprises who need coworking spaces in our town.
 - A Keeping it Fresh Greenhouse and commercial kitchen to support local food entrepreneurs.
 - A local Black history museum and library bringing visibility to the legacy of Black leaders in McDowell County.
 - An event center that celebrates Black culture and community via music, arts, and creative endeavors.
 - A culturally appropriate medical clinic for black, brown, and low income white community members.
 - A technology center to serve low-income communities to build skills to make more than a living wage through code writing.
 - Provide quality and culturally aligned childcare and after school programming that complements our workforce needs.
 - A recreation center with a public swimming pool.
 - A space to facilitate our monthly community forums and health equity town halls
 - A space to host community organizing retreats and workshops that share tools from our book, "Shift Happens in Community: A Toolkit to Build Power and Ignite Change."
 - We also envision our building being a safe space for communities during environmental disasters, such as fires, floods, and other adverse climate events.
- **Community Impact (quantify / provide estimates):** Our project is estimated to create 55 living wage jobs. We will retain 12 employees (7 full time and 5 part-time employees of West Marion Inc.) Our salaries are competitive and range from \$50,000 to \$80,000 depending on the position. In addition, we will create 48 living wage jobs through the hub that range from our building director, office manager, maintenance department, employees to support our programs and initiatives, and building security. In addition, several of our programs support community economic diversification and job training through the commercial kitchen for BIPOC food entrepreneurs, as well as, our IT training program, which will create jobs for low income and minority communities - with a particular focus on those who are in recovery from substance misuse.

As a historical footnote, the building we will renovate in Marion was used as the school house for Black students in Old Fort when their school known as the Step School or Catawba View Grammar School was forcibly closed, despite protests by local school children and community activist Albert Joyner, and attorney George Sandlin. Today, the Old Fort Together mural depicts this event, located on the Catawba Vale Collaborative Building. Connecting these two important historical

markers of local Black civil rights history brings visibility to the legacy, history, and resiliency of our ancestors and present day community leaders.

- **Name(s) of project sponsors, developer, and/or business owner, if identified:** West Marion Community Forum Inc.
- **Technical Assistance Needed (refer to Attachment A, page 5, for TA requested in this RFP):** We welcome TA to support us to develop our business plan, architectural drawings, industrial engineers, feasibility study to determine cost of programs, financial pro forma financial projections, structuring of project financing, operations planning, identification of project developers, and investor outreach.

5. **Clean Energy Focus:** Our clean energy focus will include obtaining a green building certification and solar power generation. We will ensure our building efficiently uses energy, water, and reduces waste and environmental degradation.
6. **Applicant Capacity:** Paula Swepson, Executive Director of West Marion Inc., Paula provides executive level leadership to West Marion, Inc., a Black-led nonprofit that over the past 7 years has raised over 7 million dollars from public and private foundations. Experience includes: Board Member of Mountain Bizworks, Graduate of the NC Rural Center's Rural Economic Development Institute, Cohort Member with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Rural Investment Collaborative, Co-Author of the book "Shift Happens in Community: A Toolkit to Build Power and Ignite Change." In addition, she has facilitated over 200 community forums and provided expertise on community engagement, health equity, nonprofit management, trust based philanthropy, and diversity, equity, and inclusion to nonprofits, funders, and businesses across the state.

Paula will be responsible for the overall project. She will use her team to learn and execute this project to be what the community wants and what the county needs. Paula is a true leader who started the nonprofit with no experience but has created with her team an amazing organization that is recognized as an innovator and creative community change agent on the local, state, national and international stage. She grew her nonprofit from an annual operating budget of \$125,000 a year to a \$1 million a year budget.

Furthermore, her nonprofit's expertise is promoting inclusive community processes – they design participatory community meetings for residents to share their vision for change, identify problems, share opportunities, build relationships, and have their voices heard when decisions are made that affect their livelihoods. This is the cornerstone of their work and mission as a nonprofit and is exemplified through their racial equity roundtable discussions, the co-creation of a countywide racial equity statement, county wide monthly forums, and quarterly health equity town halls.

Core Team Members Include:

- Heather Cotton, Planning and Development Director for the City of Marion and Board Member for West Marion Inc.
- Emily Roberts, Coordinator at The Southern Economic Advancement Project, Board Member for West Marion Inc.
- Dawna Ledbetter, Director of Equity at West Marion Inc.
- Ginger Webb, Director of Community Engagement for West Marion, Inc.
- Mary Snow, CEO of Equitable Community Strategies