

Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative (AGCI) 2024

Program Information, Selection Criteria and Application Instructions

Program Information

Through the program, teams will be provided with the skills and knowledge to:

- Leverage natural, cultural, and recreation assets
- Revitalize main streets and downtowns
- Promote arts and culture opportunities
- Build cultural heritage and natural resource tourism
- Create lasting economic opportunity

The program focuses on the specific trends and opportunities in Appalachian gateway communities related to sustainable drivers for economic development, cultural heritage and natural resource tourism. It also incorporates the arts to strengthen and brand communities. A coach will be made available to each team during the workshop, with support from The Conservation Fund across the program.

In addition to content from national and regional subject matter experts, a core element of the program is facilitated exercises that lead the community teams through asset identification, strengths and gaps assessment, and action planning. Each team develops a detailed action plan through the program to implement a collaborative project of value to their community. After completing the training program, teams can apply for seed grant funding to help implement the action plan!

The program registration fee is \$600 per team. This covers the curriculum content as well as meals during the workshop. Teams/team members will be responsible for their lodging during the workshop (\$142/night for single or double occupancy) and travel to and from the workshop. Team financial assistance may be available and is determined based on need and on a case-by-case basis.

Eligibility:

- Team applicants must be located within the Appalachian Region as defined by ARC – to confirm, see <https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-counties-served-by-arc/>.
- Teams must represent a gateway community - defined as a community that borders or is near publicly owned lands such as national and state parks and forests.
- Preference will be given to teams representing at least one county classified as ‘distressed’ or ‘at-risk’ by ARC (FY 2024). To confirm economic distress status, see <https://www.arc.gov/classifying-economic-distress-in-appalachian-counties/>.

Community-Based Teams:

- Communities are selected to attend as a team of 5 – 8 community members.
- Each team must have at least one community leader (elected official or acknowledged community leader), one public land representative, and one arts representative.
- Additional team representatives may come from tourism bureaus/destination marketing organizations, chamber of commerce or local business representatives, private sector businesses, natural resource representatives, recreation assets representatives, civic leaders or others in public service roles.
- Team participants should be selected based on who has (or should have) the ability to influence or lead implementation related to gateway community assets and amenities, programming and interpretation, visitor services, marketing and communications, or community capacity.
- Team membership should reflect a diverse cross-section of the community.
- All team members are expected to attend the entire workshop and pre-/post-workshop webinars; additional community members may participate in the initial exercise (pre-workshop) to identify assets.

Important Dates:

- January 10, 2024: Informational webinar **recommended, not required*
- January 24, 2024 by 5pm ET: Letter of interest deadline **recommended, not required*
- **February 6, 2024 by 5pm ET: Team application deadline**
- February 23, 2024: Notification of team acceptance
- March 8, 2024: Team registration fee (\$600) & team member confirmation due
- March 13 & 20, 2024, 3 – 5 pm ET: Pre-workshop webinars (*tentative dates*)
- April 15, 2024: Optional afternoon tour (in-person in Decatur, Alabama)
- April 16 – 18, 2024: Workshop (in-person, Decatur, Alabama)
- May 2024 (*dates TBD*): Post-workshop webinars (2)

Selection Criteria

The program's intended participants are gateway communities seeking to address challenges and opportunities through a focus on arts promotion and recreation resources—especially in downtown areas, and natural and cultural heritage tourism opportunities. In selecting community-based teams, general preference is given to:

- Applications seeking to address challenges of particular importance to gateway communities
- Applications that identify opportunities for public arts
- Teams representing at least one county classified as 'distressed' or 'at-risk' by ARC
- Teams with diverse representation of their community
- Teams that submit a letter of interest (due January 24, 2024)

Instructions for Submitting Team Application

Application Context:

- Please develop your response to the items below, then submit responses through the online form (link will be available at: <https://www.conservationfund.org/appalachian-gateway-community-initiative-2024>). Should attachments (such as a map of your community) be helpful please submit those to Susan Elks at selks@conservationfund.org following submission of the team's online form.
- A team leader must be identified to coordinate submission of the team application and serve as the point of contact. The team leader is responsible for notifying The Conservation Fund of any team member substitutions should any occur after submission of the application.
- One application per team/per community.
- A community leader, public land representative, and arts organization representative are **required team members**.
- Teams will be notified of their acceptance by February 23, 2024, when instructions to pay the team registration fee will be provided to the team leader. The fee (\$600/team) is due by March 8, 2024.
- Team financial assistance may be available and is determined based on need and on a case-by-case basis. Requests for assistance are not part of the selection review process but the information on the level and type of assistance requested is collected at the time of application.
- A review panel will evaluate submissions and forward recommendations to ARC for final approval.

Application Items:

Please develop your team's responses to items 1 – 5 in advance, then submit through the online form (link will be available at: <https://www.conservationfund.org/appalachian-gateway-community-initiative-2024>). Should attachments (such as a map of your community) be helpful please send those to Susan Elks at selks@conservationfund.org following the submission of the team's online form. Excluding contact information, application responses are not anticipated to be longer than five pages. The application deadline is February 6, 2024, by 5:00 pm Eastern Time.

Administrative Information

1. Contact Information for Lead Applicant

Name and Affiliation (title and organization)

Mailing Address

Phone

Email

2. Team Member Information and Affiliation

List each team member, their contact information, and a description of their role in the community, noting who is serving as the roles of community leader, public land representative, and arts organization representative.

3. Financial Assistance

If applicable, please note your team's need for financial assistance. Please provide details, and specify the amount requested and how it would be used (such as to offset lodging or travel, which team members are requesting support, or a request to waive the team fee).

Gateway Community Context

4. Area Description (approximately 2 pages)

Address the following three items:

4.A. Describe the geographic boundaries of the team requesting to participate in the training program – city, county, multi-county region. List the neighboring public land(s) for which you are a gateway community. A map that shows the boundaries of your community (city, county, or region) as well as neighboring public land(s) can be submitted by email to selks@conservationfund.org.

4.B. Describe the economic conditions of the target area, including its ARC designation by county (distressed, at-risk, transitional, etc.). For more information, go to <https://www.arc.gov/classifying-economic-distress-in-appalachian-counties/>

4.C. Briefly describe the relationship between the community and neighboring public land.

5. Outcomes, Opportunities, Challenges, Arts, and Community Capacity Responses (approximately 2-3 pages)

Address the following five questions:

5.A. What outcomes does your team hope to get from participating in this program?

5.B. What opportunities and challenges do your community and/or public land seek to address?

5.C. What efforts, if any, are underway to address these opportunities and challenges?

5.D. What community arts assets are you most proud to accentuate (such as programs, events, or displays across architecture, fine arts, traditional crafts, film, etc.)?

5.E. What is the capacity of the community team – with community and regional partners – to implement the action plan resulting from program participation? Do you have a potential project in mind (not required, but please describe if so)?

Contact Information

For additional information about the Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative (AGCI), please contact Susan Elks with The Conservation Fund (610-563-1516) | selks@conservationfund.org.

AGCI Program Sponsors

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts. The Appalachian Region, as defined in

ARC's authorizing legislation, is a region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi, including 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. The Region includes 423 counties, extends more than 1,000 miles, and is home to 24.8 million people. Each year, ARC provides funding for several hundred projects in the Appalachian Region in areas such as business development, education and job training, telecommunications, infrastructure, community development, housing, and transportation. These projects create thousands of new jobs; improve local water and sewer systems; increase school readiness; expand access to health care; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide technical and managerial assistance to emerging businesses. www.arc.gov

National Endowment of the Arts (NEA)

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. www.arts.gov

The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund protects America's most critical lands and waters to provide greater access to nature, strengthen local economies and enhance climate resiliency. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect more than 8.8 million acres of land. At The Conservation Fund, we believe in conservation that makes economic sense. Every project places conservation at its center, and our entrepreneurial staff create and implement innovative, practical ways to benefit the natural world and the well-being of Americans from every walk of life. We inspire new, innovative models that prove strategic conservation is good for both people and the environment. www.conservationfund.org