



STRATEGIC PLANNING REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Appalachian Partnership, Inc. (API) and Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth, LLC (APEG) are soliciting proposals for a highly-participatory economic development strategic planning process. This will be the first formal strategic planning process undertaken for the region and is intended both to chart direction for the organizations and, through its participatory process, to foster buy-in and support for API/APEG and the plan's implementation among the region's business leaders and other key stakeholders.

API/APEG anticipates that it will contract with a single lead firm (Consultant) to conduct the planning process. The Lead firm may include third-parties in its project team, however the lead firm must remain accountable for the entire project and all payments under the contract will be made to the lead firm.¹ The anticipated timeline calls for API/APEG to complete proposal review and let a contract no later than October 31, 2018 and for the Consultant to complete all planning activities no later than May 31, 2019.

As non-governmental organizations, API and APEG are not subject to formal governmental bidding and procurement rules or regulations. API and APEG reserve the right to modify or cancel this RFP, negotiate any and all elements of the project with proposer(s) and to use whatever subjective and objective criteria they deem appropriate to evaluate proposals. In addition, API/APEG will consult with major investors underwriting the planning process and other stakeholders prior to making a final contractual commitment for the work.

The targeted budget for this project is \$150,000. API/APEG reserves the right to modify this amount as appropriate given the specifics of the proposals received, negotiations with prospective Consultants, and any options or enhancements included in the final contract.

Proposals are due by 5:00 p.m. Friday September 7, 2018. API/APEG has not identified a preferred vendor for this project. All qualified parties are invited to respond to this RFP.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Organizational Structure and Mission

Appalachian Partnership, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in August, 2011 as a successor to the Ohio Appalachian Business Council which operated under the auspices of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio.

API has two single-member LLC subsidiaries: Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth, LLC (APEG), formed in 2011 to serve as the JobsOhio network partner for 25 Appalachian Ohio counties, and Appalachian Growth Capital, LLC (AGC), formed in 2017 to increase the availability of credit for small and mid-sized businesses across all 32 Federally designated Appalachian Counties of Ohio.

¹ API/APEG recognizes that services of certain highly qualified individuals may be sought out by multiple proposers to serve on their project team. Nothing in this RFP prohibits a prospective team member from participating in multiple proposals.

The mission of API is “to promote enduring, widely-shared economic prosperity in Appalachian Ohio by improving the private-sector business economy.” An early and ongoing focus within this mission is to dampen the boom and bust cycles the region has experienced from resource extraction by helping diversify the economy and by capturing more value from the region’s natural resources through manufacturing or processing that utilizes those resources within the region.

The mission of APEG incorporates the overarching mission of API “to foster enduring, widely-shared prosperity in Appalachian Ohio.” APEG’s mission is more limited in that it does this by serving as the JobsOhio partner for 25 counties, helping to retain, expand and attract businesses in the traded sectors of the region’s economy and to market and improve the region’s inventory of development sites.

While API and AGC serve all 32 officially-designated Appalachian counties of Ohio, the primary focus of this planning process is the 25-county region served by APEG. (Please see www.apeg.com/maps for maps of the API and APEG regions.) In addition, although AGC is a subsidiary of API and an important contributor to meeting API’s mission, this planning process is not intended to focus on AGC. AGC is available to respond, within its capacity, should the planning process identify access to credit by businesses as a priority requiring action, but this RFP does not seek to provide a plan for AGC.

B. History and Impetus for the Planning Project

Ohio Appalachian Business Council (OABC) operated for several years under the auspices of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) as an all-volunteer group of business leaders interested in improving the economy of Appalachian Ohio and reducing the boom and bust cycles the region had experienced from resource extraction. OABC also aspired to build a “private-sector business voice” for the development needs of the region and recognized the need to address a severe lack of access to affordable loan capital to support the growth of the region’s small and mid-sized businesses.

In 2011, when Governor John Kasich and the Ohio legislature authorized JobsOhio through HB1, the Appalachian region of Ohio lacked a private-sector led economic development organization to serve as JobsOhio’s regional partner organization. The Kasich administration learned of OABC and FAO and asked them to stand up a business-led nonprofit to serve as the region’s JobsOhio partner. OABC incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and created a single-member LLC subsidiary, APEG, to assume the JobsOhio role. (OABC was later renamed as Appalachian Partnership, Inc.)

APEG began operations in late 2011 with a board member serving as its volunteer Chief Implementation Officer until a CEO search could be completed. Economic Development projects were serviced through a contract with an experienced independent consultant until John Molinaro started as CEO for API and APEG on July 1, 2012 and an initial team of staff was assembled in October 2012.

Due to the speed with which APEG was founded to address the JobsOhio opportunity, no formal strategic planning process was conducted for API or APEG. Plans to develop a private sector business voice for the region and address the shortage of loan capital were put on hold as API focused its early efforts on buildout of its APEG subsidiary.

API continued to see a broader mission for itself than the JobsOhio role. In April 2012 it agreed to serve as the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) service provider for the region. To reduce confusion

and eliminate the need to market under two names, MEP services were marketed under the APEG brand until they were discontinued in 2017.

Beginning in 2013, several major federal awards were pursued to work on building up the region's important hardwood forest products sector and address other issues important to the region. While formally contracted under API and not directly addressing APEG's JobsOhio-related role, these services were also branded under APEG's name.

By 2016, API's board turned its attention back to how it could address its goal of creating a private sector business voice for the region. In May, 2017, the board concluded that development of a private sector business voice for the region and increased support for API and APEG's mission would require a participatory strategic planning process. Absent a clear plan and vision, the goals of API and APEG were too vague to rally business support and participation.

Concurrently with this, API continued to seek out opportunities to launch a lending subsidiary. It was finally successful in these efforts in 2017 with the launch of AGC. By the time of AGC's launch in 2017, the operation of so many non-JobsOhio roles under the APEG brand was causing confusion and misplaced expectations in the region. Therefore, AGC was launched with its own branding.

The region readily accepted the additional brand and demonstrated understanding of the connection between the APEG and AGC brands. This helped convince API's leaders that the time was right to separate the APEG/JobsOhio brand from the brand of other API services and for it to pursue its long-term plan to develop API as a private sector business voice for the region.

Concurrently, JobsOhio expressed a desire for the JobsOhio-supported functions and staffing of API/APEG to be separated and for APEG to have the full-time services of a dedicated CEO rather than sharing a CEO with API and AGC. To accomplish this, a reorganization was undertaken and Mike Jacoby was promoted to serve as CEO of APEG. The reorganization was publicly announced on April 11, 2018. The intention of API and APEG to jointly pursue a highly-participatory, regional strategic planning process was also announced at this time.

III. PURPOSE, GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

At a multi-day retreat in May, 2018, the boards of directors and senior staff of API and APEG met to develop the purpose, goals, desired outcomes and action steps required to engage in a joint strategic planning process. The outcomes of that work are reflected in this section.

A. Purpose of the Strategic Planning Process

To engage business and community leaders across Appalachian Ohio in the development and execution of a strategic plan to enhance our region's economy so that businesses thrive and people do better.

B. Goals for the Strategic Planning Process

The goals of API and APEG through this process are to:

1. Engage regional business leadership and other key constituencies in the planning process and retain their buy-in for execution of the strategies
2. Form a lasting business leadership board
3. Ensure API/APEG's efforts are focused on areas we have the ability to impact
4. Ensure API/APEG's efforts are prioritized so that our limited time and resources yield the highest results
5. Ensure goals are ambitious enough to elicit excitement but are achievable
6. Ensure alignment between APEG-driven elements of the plan and JobsOhio priorities
7. Develop a shared regional vision for:
 - a. The region's potential to improve business-driven economic growth
 - b. Basic goals, objectives and strategies derived through the planning process
 - c. The most efficient way to prioritize strategic and operational roles for APEG and API
 - d. Realistic strategies, tactics, and milestones related to the roles and mission of API and APEG
 - e. Recommendations concerning roles of external partners in addressing economic development-related and broader regional strategies including ownership and operational execution
8. Identify existing and necessary resources to implement the plan

C. Desired Outcomes from the Strategic Planning Process

1. An enduring board of business leaders committed to the success of the region through APEG and API.²
2. An actionable plan that:
 - a. Yields measurable economic development successes in areas prioritized by APEG and JobsOhio (jobs, investment & payroll) as well as in other areas important to regional prosperity prioritized by business participants in the process.
 - b. Lays the groundwork for a fundraising program and/or capital campaign to support and extend the work of APEG and API to address the plan's priorities.
 - c. Includes recommendations around volunteer/business leadership models to advance API and APEG goals.
3. A group of committed business leaders engaged and willing to support execution of the plan through their time and resources.
4. Increased understanding and support of the mission and strategic plan of API and APEG among other key constituencies and partners necessary for the plan's success.

² API and APEG do not anticipate that the Consultant will be involved in the selection and recruitment of board members. We anticipate that the participatory nature of the planning process will allow the organizations to identify potential board candidates and, by observing the nature of their participation, gain perspective on their suitability to serve in board roles and their commitment to the region's prosperity.

5. Rebranding of APEG without “Appalachia” in the title.³
6. A financial model for APEG that is less dependent upon JobsOhio for funding (such as a real estate development model that will generate cash flow in the long term). The consultant will be asked to provide input from experience and knowledge of financial models that work in similar regions.

D. Additional Planning Considerations

Due to the nature of the region and structure of the organizations, several other major considerations must come into play in developing a plan that achieves the desired purpose, goals and outcomes. These include:

- While the region served by API and APEG has a population of around one million people, residents are dispersed in small cities, towns and rural areas. No large city or population cluster serves to unite the region. Like many rural regions with historic natural resource extraction and manufacturing economic bases, many parts of the region have suffered from decades of job and population loss. This has also resulted in a loss of hope or belief that economic development efforts can improve the future. Part of the consultant’s role should be to provide examples of similar regions around the country that have been successful and how they did so, including how the business and government leadership rallied around key priorities, developed collaborative plans of action and allocated the resources necessary to execute those plans.
- API and APEG generally view the APEG region as having two distinct sub-regions: eastern and southern Ohio. A primary differentiator of these sub-regions is the rich Utica and Marcellus shale play in eastern Ohio, but there are other elements of their economies that differ and location quotients for some industries can vary significantly. It will be necessary for the research to take note of these differences and for the plan to differentiate between region-wide and sub-regional strategies.
- While there is excellent highway access into and out of most of the region, the highway network does not support efficient travel between eastern and southern Ohio. Collecting all major stakeholders at a single location in the region results in at least some participants having as much as a six-hour roundtrip. As a result, API and APEG always conduct public-facing meetings and events in at least two sub-regional locations. The public participation elements of respondents’ proposals should be designed with this in mind.
- API and APEG anticipate that the research, analysis and public participation process will identify a range of issues. Some will fall within APEG’s JobsOhio-related mission, some within the mission of API and some within the purview of other parties. In conducting the planning and public participation process, the selected consultant will be expected to help manage expectations of participants as to the APEG/JobsOhio role versus the roles of API and other parties. In particular, it will be important to keep, in the forefront, the need for the region to

³ APEG has determined that the reference to Appalachia in its name constitutes a barrier to business recruitment. It anticipates that the rollout of the plan developed through this process will provide a unique opportunity to rebrand. The selected consultant will not be responsible for developing a new brand identify for APEG but the planning process should be conducted in a fashion that assists APEG in conveying the need for rebranding to local stakeholders and identifying options and considerations for its rebranding.

provide or secure the resources necessary to address critical roles that fall outside the APEG/JobsOhio mission.

- Since some elements of the strategic plan for the region may not be within the purview of APEG or API but instead fall within the realm of partner organizations (such as local development districts or the Ohio University Voinovich School), APEG and API intend to establish a Partner Liaison Group to ensure communication among, input from and collaboration with partner organizations. Consultant involvement in interactions with this group will be expected.
- APEG has identified a shortage of quality industrial sites and buildings as being a major barrier to its efforts to attract new business investment and jobs to the region. Given the rugged terrain, in parts of the region, most of the most desirable sites for industrial development are brownfields, in the floodplain or former strip-mines, requiring costly remediation. In some portions of the region, upgrades to the highway networks have bypassed former industrial areas and greenfield development will be necessary to capture additional investment by industry. For both brownfield and greenfield sites, the tools available from state sources for investment in site development are very limited, few communities have the financial capacity to make public investments, and there is seldom an active private sector developer available.
- Access to broadband and cellular data service in the region is spotty. A major backbone loop touching most counties was installed as an American Recovery Act project but funding was insufficient to make most last-mile connections. There is no comprehensive plan to extend access to unserved and underserved areas. This can be a major barrier to marketability and development of otherwise promising sites.
- The region has several notable natural-resource focused opportunities:
 - Eastern Ohio sits upon two of the most productive natural gas and natural gas liquids producing formations in the world, resulting in several opportunities and constraints:
 - The region hosts the lowest priced natural gas outside the Middle East and also has very competitive deregulated electric rates, making it very attractive for energy-intensive industries.
 - The region's natural gas is rich in ethane and other natural gas liquids, the primary feedstocks of the chemicals and polymers industries. This provides a significant supply cost advantage for industries utilizing these feedstocks.
 - It is highly-likely that the final investment decision will be announced for a \$5+ billion ethane cracker facility in eastern Ohio, similar to the facility being built just east of the region in Pennsylvania by Shell. These facilities will be game changers for the region, supporting many spin-off and supporting businesses and also significantly reducing the cost of polyethylene supplies for plastics manufacturers locating in the area.
 - Appalachian Ohio hardwoods are among the best in the world and support \$25 billion in state GDP. Appalachian Ohio is harvesting only 60% of the amount necessary to keep its forests healthy. In addition, three quarters of the Ohio harvest is exported in its two lowest value forms – as raw logs or as green lumber. This provides a tremendous opportunity to increase sustainable harvests and attract supply chain industries to further process the region's hardwoods into intermediate and finished products.

IV. SCOPE, TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

A. Scope of Project

The Consultant's overall responsibility will be to provide an original plan containing goals, objectives, a strategic implementation plan and implementation measures. The consultant will also provide meeting facilitation services and supporting materials, as well as assistance to APEG's Director of Communication & Digital Marketing with content and direction to help guide the public outreach process.

API/APEG will afford proposers with wide latitude to design a planning process that addresses the Purpose, Goals, Desired Outcomes and Additional Considerations outlined in the previous section within the practical limits imposed by the available resources. The targeted budget for this project is \$150,000 and the proposal should be designed to provide the core elements discussed below within this amount.

Core elements of the Consultant's proposed work-plan should, at a minimum, include the following:

1. A robust public participation process designed to involve business leaders and other key stakeholders in the planning process, solicit their input, engage their interest and encourage their commitment to the implementation of the completed plan.
 - The participation process should also describe expected roles of the Consultant with the Partner Liaison Group described in Section III. D., above.
2. A research program that describes the current economic base of the region (including, where warranted, the eastern and southern sub-regions discussed in Section III. D., above) as well as status of industries examined. The research program should also address important supporting factors such as workforce, infrastructure and development site inventory. At a minimum the research program should examine the nine industries prioritized by JobsOhio (see <https://jobs-ohio.com>) as well as other industries that are, or have the capacity to become, important components of the region's economy.⁴ This might include traded sectors appropriate for APEG to address as part of its JobsOhio-focused mission or other important sectors that might be addressed by API and its other subsidiaries.
3. Identification and comparative analysis of benchmark regions.
4. Analysis of the data provided which identifies opportunities to expand the economic base, including target market opportunities to increase diversity of the base in ways that reduce the vulnerability of the region to economic boom-and-bust cycles. Attention should be given to the potential of the opportunities described to positively impact the prosperity of the people, communities and businesses of the region (addressing the focus of API/APEG's mission on "*enduring, widely-shared economic prosperity*").
5. Examination of barriers that must be addressed to capitalize on opportunities and to prevent deterioration of industries within the identified sectors.

⁴ Note that some industries prioritized by JobsOhio are a better fit for the region than others. We do not assume that the same level of research or analysis must be performed for industries that have a low likelihood of being a significant contributor to the region's economy, but enough high-level analysis should be done for each JobsOhio priority industry to determine whether it is an appropriate focus for the region.

6. Identification of untapped or underutilized 3rd party resources (business support, state or federal programs, etc.) that may be available to support important strategies identified in the planning process.
7. Production of deliverables that are specifically drafted for API/APEG.⁵

Respondents may propose optional enhancements at additional cost. In evaluating whether to contract for any of the proposed options, API/APEG will consider their costs and benefits in comparison with the core work-plan and enhancements proposed by other respondents. Please note that API/APEG has secured \$150,000 in sponsor commitments for the planning process. Any amount beyond this will require API/APEG to secure additional commitments or draw upon limited reserves, so availability of resources beyond the targeted budget is not a given.

B. Timeline

API and APEG anticipate that RFP review and the planning process will take place on the approximate timeline outlined below. Respondents that require substantial deviation from this schedule should contact API/APEG to discuss the feasibility of their proposed changes prior to submitting a proposal.

RFP Responses Due: 5:00 p.m. 9/7/2018

Initial Proposal Review and Scoring: 9/7/2018 – 9/30/2018

Interview Top Candidates: 10/1/2018 – 10/17/2018

Select, Negotiate and Hire Firm, Determine Working Structure: 10/17/2018 – 10/31/2018

Conduct Research, Public Participation and Planning Process: 11/1/2018 – 4/30/2019

Draft Deliverables Due: 04/30/2019

Finalize Deliverables for Intended Audiences: By 5/31/2019

Stakeholder and Public Dissemination of Results: 6/1/2019 – 6/30/2019

Implementation, Progress Monitoring and Adjustments: Beginning 7/1/2019 and ongoing

C. Deliverables

API/APEG expects deliverables, drafted specifically for API/APEG, that:

- Document the research and plan,
- Assign responsibilities to API, APEG and other partners,
- Estimate the human and financial resources necessary to achieve the plan's goals and objectives, and
- Provide measures to track progress towards goals and objectives, including source citations for any measures that rely upon external data sources.

⁵ With the exception of templates for presenting data that would be generally found in a plan of this type, generic "change the name and fill in the blanks" deliverables are not acceptable.

It is not assumed or preferred that the deliverables be in the form of a single large written report. While a clear and concise public summary is a must, API and APEG welcome options that present the results of various elements of the planning process in ways that are most useful to relevant audiences.

V. RESPONDING TO THE RFP

A. Method and Format of Response

Proposals should be mailed, or delivered in person with an electronic copy also provided.

There are no limits to the number of pages, but respondents are asked to be concise. No type within the proposal should be smaller than 10 point and margins should not be less than ¾ inch.

Ten (10) copies of the proposal should be mailed or delivered by the due date. At least one copy should be unbound to allow for additional copying. All pages should be on standard sized paper (8.5 x 11, 8.5 x 14 or 11 x 17).

In addition, a digital copy of the proposal should be submitted in PDF format, preferably in a single file. All pages of the PDF must be printable on 8.5 x 11 paper. Files larger than 5 Mb in size should be sent via a file downloading service such as www.sendthisfile.com (available at no cost at this web address).

B. Deadline for Submission

The deadline for proposal submission is 5:00 p.m. Friday September 7, 2018. Proposers should allow adequate time for delivery by this deadline and send via a method that allows delivery tracking. The digital copy should be directed to cbrainard@apppart.org and sent it sufficiently in advance to ensure last-minute connectivity issues do not interfere with its delivery. API will send an e-mail acknowledgement of receipt for all timely e-mail submissions. If you do not receive a receipt, please follow up by calling Carolyn Brainard at 740-753-5359.

C. Contents of Proposal

Responses to this RFP should incorporate the following elements:

1. Transmittal letter or e-mail identifying the firm, point of contact, e-mail and phone
2. Proposed work-plan responsive to the scope outlined in Section IV, above
3. Detailed description of the proposed business and stakeholder participation process
4. Proposed project schedule
5. Statement of Consultant qualifications including resumes of key personnel
6. Budget/fees differentiated between core and optional elements of the proposal
7. At least three client references, with emphasis on:
 - a. Similar projects
 - b. Projects focused on a rural or largely rural region
 - c. Projects with a high degree of participation in the planning process

8. Disclosure of any known or potential conflicts of interest with API, APEG, JobsOhio or their board and staff members (API and APEG staff and board lists are available at www.apeg.com and www.appart.org).

Respondents are asked to provide a concise submission of sufficient detail to evaluate in comparison to other proposals.

D. Pre-Proposal Communications

Pre-proposal communications are permitted through API/APEG's designated contacts. Because we anticipate a significant number of responses, we ask that you thoroughly review the RFP and consolidate your questions into the fewest possible calls or e-mails.

Designated contacts for this RFP are API CEO John Molinaro and APEG CEO Mike Jacoby. Both are available to field calls and e-mails, however Mike's time is expected to be especially limited during the response period. Therefore, we ask that you start with John if it makes sense given the nature of your inquiry. If you desire to talk to Mike, please e-mail him to set up a time and establish a calling number before initiating a call. Their contact information is:

John Molinaro: jmolinaro@appart.org, 740-753-5359 (office) or 740-447-1110 (cell)

Mike Jacoby: mjacoby@apeg.com

API/APEG expect all communications regarding this planning process and RFP to flow through John Molinaro and Mike Jacoby. API/APEG Board members, project steering committee members, investors in the planning process or others involved in the selection process, should not be contacted regarding this RFP. Proposers that make such contact may be removed from consideration.

VI. PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS

API/APEG staff will conduct a preliminary review of proposals to ensure their completeness. Complete proposals will be scored by senior staff, an API/APEG board steering committee and a business leadership team assembled for the planning process. API/APEG anticipates that up to three responsive and competitive proposals will be selected for in person Consultant Interviews. (APEG may consider virtual interviews if logistics or timing become a significant issue with a candidate.) A single firm will be selected and, subject to successful contract negotiations, hired to conduct the work. The anticipated schedule for review is listed in Section IV. B., above.

At a minimum, the evaluation process will consider:

1. Completeness and responsiveness of the proposal
2. Qualifications, capabilities and experience of firm and assigned staff
3. Proposed methodology and timelines
4. Consultant's experience and track record working with similar rural and/or Appalachian regions
5. Performance reported by references and other third-parties familiar with Consultant's work
6. Value delivered for the project budget and for any selected optional services

VII. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

API and APEG make no commitment to any respondent to this RFP beyond consideration of its written response. Proposers will not be compensated in any way for the preparation of a proposal or participation in the proposal review or interview process. API/APEG will not discriminate against any firm or individual on the bases of race, creed, color, sex, age, disability or national origin in the proposal review and award process. API and APEG reserve the right to discuss the details of proposals submitted with any third parties whose input they believe may be useful for proposal review.

As non-governmental organizations, API and APEG are not subject to formal governmental bidding and procurement rules or regulations. API and APEG reserve the sole right to modify or cancel this RFP, waive irregularities in any proposal, negotiate any and all elements of the project with proposer(s) and to use whatever subjective and objective criteria they deem appropriate to evaluate proposals. In addition, API/APEG will consult with investors underwriting the planning process and other stakeholders prior to making a final contractual commitment for the work.

Specific terms of any resulting contract will be negotiated between API/APEG and the successful proposer. The executed contract will include progress payments based on completion of designated project elements and a hold-back until all project elements are successfully completed. The contract will also specify that the resulting deliverables are “works made for hire,” and as such are the intellectual property solely of API and APEG, not to be shared by the Consultant with third parties without express written consent.

The qualifications of each member of the Consultant’s project team are important criteria in the selection process. The selected Consultant may not substitute any team member without prior approval by the API/APEG. API/APEG, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to accept or reject proposed changes to the team. Team members may participate in multiple proposals.