GENERATION
WEST VIRGINIA

Request for Proposals

<u>WV/PA ARISE Implementation plan</u>

Generation WV (GWV) is requesting proposals from qualified consultants to work with project partners to create a detailed action plan to integrate and scale proven workforce development and digital literacy programs into a multi state (Pennsylvania/West Virginia) Fiber and Digital Literacy Workforce Training program that will help underserved residents to secure well-paying jobs and close the digital divide.

RFP Publication 4/7/2025

Questions Due 4/22/2025 2:00pm EST

Proposals due 5/9/2025 4:00pm EST

For more information contact Annie Stroud, annie@generationwv.org | 304-804-6703

Or visit https://generationwv.org/rfp-arc-arise/

Overview and background

Summary

Generation WV is seeking a consultant to develop a plan to integrate and scale proven workforce development and digital literacy programs into a multi state (PA/WV) Fiber and Digital Literacy Workforce Training program that will help underserved residents to secure well-paying jobs and close the digital divide. The deliverable will be a detailed action plan to guide the regional effort to prepare under-resourced workforce participants for well-paying jobs that support broadband fiber deployment and adoption.

Project background

Existing model: Non-profit organizations in Pennsylvania and West Virginia are preparing jobseekers for the over 1,500+ jobs needed to support planned expansion of broadband fiber to unserved homes and businesses across the region. The Gismondi Job Training Program of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh offers three-month training for residents in five in-demand certifications in the telecommunications industry with starting wages of $20/hour. Working closely with Catholic Charities and the Washington County Authority, Pittsburgh-based non-profit Computer Reach provides Digital Navigator Services that offer baseline digital skills training and computer services to community members and jobseekers. This combination of fast-track job training and digital literacy programs is proving successful in connecting residents with high-demand, well-paying jobs, while preparing the ready workforce needed for broadband expansion.

Regional coordination among these PA-based stakeholders and two WV-based stakeholders - Catholic Charities of West Virginia and non-profit Generation WV – has generated interest in replicating the Catholic Charities' broadband job training programs while expanding the Computer Reach Digital Navigator services to serve West Virginia communities.

Proposed Solution: While promising digital literacy and job training programs are beginning to address the barriers for low-income, rural residents to benefit from job growth spurred by broadband expansion, planning is needed to scale these programs to serve a broader multi state region. Catholic Charities Diocese of Pittsburgh, in partnership with the

Washington County Authority and Computer Reach, has been able to develop and pilot a model that not only addresses broadband labor force needs, but also builds up under-resourced populations and transitions them into the broadband workforce. The program provides participants with critical digital literacy skills before transitioning them into either into the broadband and telecommunications industry or into traditional workforce pipelines. Concurrently, the digital literacy training helps to promote broadband adoption and ensure demand for the fiber networks that are going to be built across the region over the next 1-8 years.

GWV is seeking a consultant to develop a clear action plan for scaling the proven model to serve more residents in the Greater Pittsburgh Area and across the State of West Virginia.

Additional resources:

Current conditions: Historic federal and state investment in broadband infrastructure, including $1.2 billion in Pennsylvania and $1.2 billion in West Virginia over the next few years, will generate hundreds of jobs, including an estimated 1,500+ jobs in West Virginia alone, to meet the swell of development. Telecommunications is one of the fastest-growing industries with thousands of jobs with strong starting wages and upward mobility that go unfilled in southwestern Pennsylvania. This "broadband boom" presents a wide variety of economic opportunities for the region, not just from the fiber construction but throughout the industry from ongoing maintenance and operations of these new telecommunications networks. However, the lack of a ready, skilled workforce threatens the region's ability to deploy high-speed broadband infrastructure that will provide access to underserved communities and boost the economy.

Counties in the proposed project area face low workforce participation due to the generational impacts of the decline in coal and the collapse of the steel and manufacturing industries. Without efforts to address barriers to job training and employment, many residents of rural Pennsylvania and West Virginia will be unable to take advantage of the opportunities provided by this unprecedented build out of infrastructure. Further, without efforts to address the skilled labor shortage, delays in the planned broadband fiber expansion could continue to deepen the digital divide.

Labor Shortage: According to the West Virginia Department of Economic Development Internet for All Five-Year Action Plan, there is an "ongoing and highly documented shortage of trained fiber-optic installers, front-line electrical workers, and network & cybersecurity professionals poses a serious obstacle to the universal broadband deployment activities being asked of the fiber industry in the next five years" (pg. 8). According to the CommonWealth of Pennsylvania 5-Year Strategy Toward Internet for All, "...trained fiber technicians are needed to build fiber networks and maintain them after they are built. ...there is a need for one technician for every 48 new fiber customers. The increased fiber projection will increase the demand for skilled workers to support these users. Training is a key element to ensuring there are enough workers locally and nationwide. Rapid support is needed to develop the programs in a timely manner and to make sure that the training covers state-of-the-art technologies and techniques" (pg. 47).

Digital Literacy: Broadband deployment throughout the project area promises to enhance online learning and remote work opportunities, expand healthcare access and telemedicine options, and support economic growth and diversification within under-resourced communities. However, the lack of digital literacy among rural residents in the Greater Pittsburgh area and across the State of West Virginia threatens to undermine these potential benefits, while also contributing to poor labor force participation, employment outcomes, and the broadband industry's workforce shortage. Individuals with low digital literacy who may not understand the potential benefits and functionalities of broadband are less likely to subscribe to broadband services when they come available. A lack of basic digital skills also limits job opportunities and hinders career advancement in today's economy. Further, a workforce lacking digital skills cannot fill many positions within the broadband and telecommunications industry, which need hundreds of new employees to support the planned fiber deployment and operation and maintenance of the new networks in the project area.

Scope of services

1. **Kick-Off Meeting:** The project partners and consultant will host a kickoff meeting to confirm goals of the planning process, establish regular meeting times, set expectations, and outline a clear project plan and timeline.

   o Deliverable: Clear goals for the planning process, regular meeting times, outline project plan and timeline.

2. **Asset Mapping & Partner Development**: The consultant will work with the project team to conduct asset mapping within the proposed project area, identifying new potential partners in West Virginia to include in project planning. The project team may also attract new partners in Pennsylvania to evaluate expanding the project area beyond the region served by Catholic Charities Diocese of Pittsburgh. The goal is for 10+ academic and workforce partners and 20+ ISPs and contractors contacted during the planning process to engage in job training program development.

3. **Plan Development:** The consultant will work with the project team to develop a plan that explores the following key issues:
   o Determine which key partners will be involved in a full implementation project.
   o Identify/finalize the most effective geographic reach.
   o Facilitate project partners in "right sizing" and phasing the project scope
   o Identify and recruit industry employers (ISPs and contractors) to be actively engaged in curriculum development and training.
   o Ensure alignment with state broadband workforce training goals.
   o Develop strategies to address the challenges that low-income rural populations experience in accessing workforce training (childcare, transportation, coaching, access to supplies, lost wages etc.).
   o Outline a phased project approach prioritizing the geographic areas with imminent, large-scale fiber deployment projects.
   o The project team intends for the final plan to guide the implementation of the PA/WV Fiber and Digital Literacy Workforce Training program, which will aim to serve 500+ individuals with no-cost digital literacy and job training services within a three-year implementation period.

4. **Presentation of final plan*:** The consultant will present a final draft of the project implementation plan to the project team, potential partners and stakeholders, who will provide feedback. The consultant will incorporate all feedback into a final planning document.

    o   Deliverable: Final phased project plan. This plan will be designed to provide the data and information needed to apply for implementation funding. **Depending on the outcomes of the planning process, the final plan deliverable could be an ARC ARISE Implementation grant application.*

Planning timeline and budget:

This planning process is expected to take ~6 months. The organization has a budget of $28,000 for this project.

Project timeline

The anticipated timeline for the selection of a vendor to conduct the feasibility study and delivery of the final report:

4/07/2025	Advertise Request for Proposal
4/22/2025 2:00pm	Clarifying questions due 2:00pm EST
4/25/2025	Question response addendum released
5/9/2025 4:00pm	Proposals due 4:00pm EST
5/14 – 5/16/2025	Interview(s*) *if needed
5/19/2025	Approval of selection
Week of 5/26/2025	Kickoff meeting with full partners
6 months after contract execution	Final deliverable

GWV reserves the right to adjust the anticipated timeline as needed.

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Experience and Criteria Evaluation

Responses should address the following criteria, which will be used to evaluate all firms:

1. **Qualifications and Experience (40 points)**

    a. Describe similar projects completed by your team, and/or segments of your team, in the last 5 years, demonstrating knowledge of the work items listed above;

    b. Demonstrate your team's knowledge and experience working with rural communities, particularly familiarity with the project areas;

    c. Demonstrate your team's experience coordinating input from multiple project stakeholders to identify a solution to serve all interested parties; and

    d. Provide a minimum of three (3) references from recent past projects.

2. **Description of Approach (35 points)**

    a. Describe the proposed process for the asset mapping and evaluation of current conditions.

    b. Describe the proposed planning process to develop an implementation plan for project partners.

3. **Demonstrate Capability to Perform Services for Project (10 points)**

    a. Identify your project team lead(s);

    b. Identify personnel and provide resumes for staff and any sub-consultants that will be assigned to the project;

    c. Provide a statement of capacity to perform the work of the project in a timely manner; and

    d. Provide an estimated timeline to complete the project.

4. **Cost Estimates (15 points)**

    a. Show appropriate allocation of hours and expenses.

    b. Provide pricing structure, fees, hourly rates

Questions

Clarifying questions must be submitted to annie@generationwv.org by 2:00 pm on 4/22/2025.

To ensure all prospective respondents equally understand any clarifications made on the RFP, all replies to all questions will be sent via blind copy to all registered parties and released in an addendum at https://generationwv.org/rfp-arc-arise/

Review and Selection

GWV will make a selection based on its review, possible interview if needed, and scoring of proposals submitted as outlined above. The project team may choose not to accept a proposal due to any math error contained in a proposal.

GWV may invite selected consultant(s) to interview and make an oral presentation to an evaluation committee. GWV will notify the selected consultant(s) as close to the intended timeframe noted above. After introductions are done, presentations will be allotted to 20 minutes to provide details beneficial to the proposal. The evaluation committee will then proceed with a list of questions for consultant response.

The qualified firm determined best suited to meet the needs of the project and perform the services will be selected by GWV and the decision shall be final.

Rights Reserved

GWV reserves the right to amend terms of the Request for Proposal and to circulate various addenda at any time. GWV reserves the right to reject any and all proposals in whole or in part, to waive any irregularities in any proposal, or withdraw the Request for Proposal at any time and re-advertise if desired, regardless of merit and time spent creating the proposal. GWV reserves the right to accept a proposal, in the judgment of GWV deemed most advantageous to the project.

Proposal Submission

This RFP and any addenda can be accessed at https://generationwv.org/rfp-arc-arise/

Proposals must be submitted by: May 9, 2025, no later than 4:00 p.m., EST.

Any communications about this project and RFP should be directed to Annie Stroud, annie@generationwv.org 304-804-6703.

All submittals must be delivered:

- In single PDF format via email, with the subject line: WV/PA ARISE Planning RFP

- Must be in the official name of the firm and will become property of GWV

- It will be submitted to Annie@generationwv.org; and

- Proposals shall not exceed twenty (20) pages, including attachments.

Generation WV will not be liable for any costs incurred by the consultant in the preparation and presentation of proposals submitted in response to this RFP.

The firm's response, including all promises, warranties, commitments, and representations made in the successful proposal shall be binding and incorporated by reference into GWV's contract with the Consultant.