Gems of Appalachia: Enhancing Appalachia's Gateways to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee National Forest

Overview
ARC, in partnership with the states of Tennessee and North Carolina, has developed a grants competition for communities that are entry points to two of Appalachia's most important natural assets: the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee National Forest. The *Gems of Appalachia Initiative* will provide funding to gateway communities – towns that border the national park and forest – that often struggle to balance the need for economic growth with the desire to protect their natural ecosystems, landscapes and cultural heritage. The competition is part of ARC's overall effort to promote asset-based economic development in Appalachia.

Every gateway community has its own unique relationship with the neighboring public lands. Some communities have successfully partnered with public land managers and are working together to establish a community vision to achieve common goals. Others are challenged to manage the opportunities and realities derived from their status as a gateway community.

This project is targeted to support Smoky Mountain and Cherokee Forest communities in their efforts to enhance their economic health, safeguard their quality of life, preserve their natural surroundings, support locally-owned businesses, retain vibrant downtowns, encourage outdoor recreation, and protect their unique gateway identity. Fostering community-based approaches and partnerships between gateway communities and neighboring public land managers are critical for protecting two of Appalachia's most cherished landscapes and the integrity of the communities that adjoin them.

Who is Eligible?
This program is targeted towards gateway communities – defined as towns and counties that are adjacent to the Great Smoky National Park and the Cherokee National Forest. Nonprofit organizations, governmental entities and public educational institutions located in a gateway town or county are eligible to apply. For-profit organizations are not eligible for this program.

What is Eligible?
Communities can request funding to implement a specific project or activity related to natural or cultural heritage tourism, community planning, asset building, recreational development or other activity that will enhance the area's unique identity as a gateway to the targeted public lands.

Examples of an eligible project or activity for a *Gems of Appalachia* gateway grant include:
- Establish a local artisan guild to improve the capacity to create, market and sell handcrafted products.
- Produce web site with downloadable video and audio tours of popular attractions.
- Develop a landfill gas power generation system from a closed landfill, turning a liability into an environmentally renewable resource.
- Create guided thematic tour (biking, hiking, climbing, birding) experiences that explore the area's recreational assets and partner with outfitters to coordinate logistics.
- Install recycling centers and promote usage to both residents and visitors.

- Upgrade downtown streetscape to enhance economic viability of Main Street and attract more visitors.
- Convene a multi-county planning workshop to develop a 12-month, sustainable tourism action plan.

Grants cannot be used to support marketing or promotional activities, such as brochures that target single-site destinations or magazine advertisements. In addition, grants cannot be used to fund construction projects.

Grant Guidelines
- Grant requests can range from $20,000 - $40,000. Applications that involve partnerships of two or more jurisdictions and/or counties can request up to $75,000.
- Grants must be matched 80/20 by the local community. Cash or in-kind match is allowable.
- Nonprofit organizations, governmental entities and public educational institutions located in or near a Smoky Mountain or Cherokee Forest gateway community are eligible to apply. For-profit organizations are not eligible.
- Deadline for grant applications is Friday, June 27th, 2008.

Selection Criteria
A review panel will evaluate submissions and forward recommendations to ARC for final approval. Applications will be evaluated on several criteria, including:
- Articulation of need.
- Capability of applicant to perform the work, including evidence of financial commitment for local match.
- Level of community support, which can be demonstrated by letters of support and indications of active participation from community stakeholders.
- Project results.

All criteria will be weighted equally. In addition, ARC encourages applicants to address the following items:

Partnerships - Engaging public and private partners is often critical to the success of local development activities. To increase the likelihood of success and sustainability, ARC encourages gateway communities to involve public, private, and institutional partners in the development and implementation of a gateway community project.

Community Leadership - ARC encourages applicants to clearly identify the involvement of existing local leadership in their proposals. Local leaders and emerging civic entrepreneurs are critical assets for developing—and redeveloping—the promise of the region.

Project Sustainability – Sustainable tourism respects a community's character and its natural resources while providing a satisfied travel experience for visitors. Gateway communities are encouraged to develop quality, sustainable projects that support the integrity of place.

***Gems of Appalachia Initiative* - Grant Application**
Please answer the following questions in no more than 5 pages, or 3 pages if using double-sides.

1. Area Description
What are the geographic boundaries of the area targeted for the grant – town, county, multi-county region? Include a map that shows the boundaries of the project area and its relation to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park or the Cherokee National Forest. Maps do not count towards the five-page application limit.

2. Project Description & Purpose
a) State in one sentence the main purpose of the project in terms of the goal and strategy being addressed.
b) Describe the specific opportunities or issues the project will address, and how being a gateway community magnifies the impact of the issue on the surrounding area.
c) Provide a detailed description of the project's activities, including:
- o   action steps
- o   who will complete each activity
- o   timeline for starting and ending the project

d) Explain why the proposed approach is the most beneficial to accomplishing the stated goals.
e) Illustrate local demand for the project (e.g. letters from key stakeholders).

3. Relation to other Local/Regional Activities
Describe how the project meets the priorities of an existing plan, or how the project will be coordinated and leveraged with other area activities.

4. Project Benefits
How will this project make a difference in the community? Where possible, use specific measures to describe the project's benefits that can be measured and tracked once the project is complete (e.g., "Draw 500 visitors to our new Thursday Nights on Main Street events, and increase sales at local businesses by 5 percent", or "Attract 40 new day-hikers per month to trail").

How do you plan to evaluate the success of the project?

5. Applicant's Capacity
Describe the applicant's experience with implementing similar projects. What was the result of these projects?

6. Detailed budget and budget narrative
Provide a detailed budget that includes sources and uses of ARC grant funds **and** all matching or in-kind funds. **The budget must clearly show a 20 percent cash or in-kind match by the applicant.** Provide a budget narrative that explains all expenditures.

7. Letters of commitment
Include letters citing the specific amount of funds committed from all matching fund sources. Provide descriptions of specific in-kind resources including the methods used to determine their value.

8. Other Supporting Materials
Enclose pertinent supporting materials that will lead to a better understanding of the proposed project. Please limit brochures and visitor guides to a minimum of two per application, and include only if necessary to explain the project. Applications and supporting materials will not be returned.

Submit five hard copies of your application and supporting materials to:

Molly Theobald, Program Operations Division
Attn: Gems of Appalachia Initiative
Appalachian Regional Commission
1666 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20009

Please direct any questions to: mtheobald@arc.gov

Phone: 202/884-7767
Fax: 202/884-7682

Applications must be received by ARC before COB on Friday, June 27th, 2008.