



Request for Proposals (RFP)

FY 2025 INSPIRE Initiative – Planning Grant

Issued by: Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission (NTRPDC)

Project Title: Fit4Work Reengagement Project – Planning Phase

Funding Source: Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) – INSPIRE Initiative and the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act (WIOA)

Release Date: January 12, 2026

RFP Due Date: February 16, 2026

1. Introduction

Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission (NTRPDC) is soliciting proposals from qualified consultants or consulting firms to conduct data collection, analysis, and strategic planning in support of the **Fit4Work Reengagement Project**. This Request for Proposals (RFP) is issued as part of NTRPDC's FY 2025 ARC INSPIRE Initiative Planning Grant.

The selected consultant will support the revitalization and strategic expansion of the Fit4Work Reengagement Project to better serve individuals in recovery from Substance Use Disorder (SUD), while assisting employers in developing recovery-ready workplace practices across the Northern Tier region of Pennsylvania.

2. Organizational Background

NTRPDC serves as the Local Development District (LDD) for Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, and Wyoming Counties, encompassing approximately 4,000 square miles in northcentral Pennsylvania. The region is predominantly rural, with low population density and approximately 171,322 residents.

NTRPDC oversees community, economic, and workforce development initiatives and serves as the fiscal agent and staff to the Northern Tier Workforce Development Board (NTWDB). The NTWDB administers workforce programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other state and federal initiatives.

Since 2018, NTRPDC has managed the Fit4Work Reengagement Project, which provides workforce preparation, work readiness training, and work-based learning opportunities for individuals with multiple barriers to employment, particularly those involved with the criminal justice system.

3. Project Background and Need

The Northern Tier region supports approximately 4,500 businesses, the majority of which are small employers. Despite an unemployment rate of 4.0% as of December 2024, employers continue to report difficulty hiring and retaining workers due to skills mismatches, lack of soft skills, and failed drug tests.

Substance Use Disorder presents a significant challenge in the region:

- Approximately 80% of individuals in Northern Tier correctional facilities are estimated to have a SUD.
- Between 2015 and 2021, the region experienced 292 accidental overdose deaths.
- Several counties have overdose death rates exceeding national averages.

The Fit4Work Reengagement Project has demonstrated success, including an 83% classroom completion rate and a 50% entered employment rate among criminal justice–impacted participants. However, the program has not operated at full capacity since the COVID-19 pandemic and lacks a comprehensive sustainability and expansion plan.

This planning grant will support the collection of data and development of a regional action plan to:

- Expand Fit4Work services to individuals in recovery
- Support employers in becoming recovery-friendly
- Strengthen referral systems and partnerships
- Ensure services complement, rather than duplicate, existing efforts

4. Purpose of the RFP

The purpose of this RFP is to procure a consultant to conduct comprehensive data collection, stakeholder engagement, and workforce analysis to inform a strategic plan for revitalizing and expanding the Fit4Work Reengagement Project.

5. Scope of Work

The selected consultant will be expected to complete the following tasks:

A. Data Collection and Analysis

- Conduct surveys, focus groups, interviews, and workforce analysis.
- Inventory existing resources available to individuals in recovery, including:
 - Workforce training programs
 - Recovery and peer support services
 - Mental and behavioral health services
 - Transportation and supportive services
 - Employer partnerships

B. Gap Analysis

- Identify gaps in workforce development and recovery support services.
- Assess county-level variations in services, policies, and infrastructure.

C. Employer Engagement

- Assess employer needs and challenges related to hiring and retaining individuals in recovery.
- Identify best practices for recovery-friendly hiring, accommodations, and workplace policies.

D. Systems Coordination

- Evaluate opportunities to better coordinate workforce, recovery, and justice-system services.
- Identify strategies to strengthen referral systems and partnerships across counties.

E. Strategic Planning and Sustainability

- Facilitate stakeholder engagement, including the Fit4Work Taskforce and new partners.
- Develop a comprehensive action plan to guide program revitalization and expansion.
- Assist in outlining sustainability strategies and potential future funding opportunities.

6. Deliverables

At a minimum, the consultant will provide:

- A summary of data collection methods and findings
- An inventory and mapping of recovery and workforce resources
- Identification of service and system gaps
- Employer needs assessment and recommended recovery-friendly strategies
- A comprehensive **Fit4Work Reengagement Strategic Plan**, including:
 - Recommended program model
 - Implementation priorities
 - Partnership and referral framework
 - Sustainability considerations
 - Present results to interested parties such as taskforce committee, the Workforce Development Board and/or the Executive Committee of NTRPDC.

7. Project Timeline

The project is expected to be completed within the timeframe established in the ARC INSPIRE Initiative Planning Grant which concludes October 31, 2026. Proposers should include a detailed work plan and timeline aligned with the project scope. Deliverables must be available and presented no later than October 1, 2026.

8. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals should include the following components:

1. **Cover Letter**
2. **Firm/Consultant Qualifications and Experience**
 - Experience with workforce development, recovery-oriented systems, justice-involved populations, or rural communities
3. **Proposed Approach and Methodology**
 - Description of data collection tools, stakeholder engagement strategies, and analysis methods
4. **Work Plan and Timeline**
5. **Project Team and Key Personnel**
6. **Budget and Budget Narrative**
7. **Relevant References**

9. Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Weights

Proposals will be evaluated by a review committee convened by NTRPDC and project partners. Proposals will be scored on a 100-point scale using the criteria below:

Evaluation Criterion	Weight
Understanding of Project Goals, Regional Context, and Population Needs	25 points
Relevant Experience and Qualifications (workforce development, recovery systems, justice-involved populations, rural communities)	25 points
Proposed Approach and Methodology (data collection, stakeholder engagement, analysis)	30 points
Project Team Capacity and Ability to Meet Timeline	10 points
Budget Reasonableness and Cost Effectiveness	10 points
Total Possible Score	100 points

The review committee may request interviews or presentations from shortlisted proposers as part of the evaluation process. NTRPDC reserves the right to select the proposal that best meets project needs and community priorities, not necessarily the lowest-cost proposal.

10. Budget and Procurement

Funding for this project is provided through the ARC INSPIRE Initiative Planning Grant and WIOA. Proposals must align with the approved project budget.

NTRPDC will conduct this procurement in accordance with applicable federal regulations, including **2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards)**, ARC and WIOA policies, as well as all applicable state requirements.

The selected consultant will be required to comply with all applicable federal laws and regulations and will be subject to contract provisions required under federal awards.

11. Strategic Alignment

This project aligns with:

- **ARC Strategic Plan – Goal 2: Building Appalachia’s Workforce Ecosystem**
- **ARC Objective 2.3: Develop a network of employment supports**

- **Pennsylvania Appalachian Development Plan – State Objective 2.5**
- **PA Strategy 2.5.2:** Provide second chances and grow the workforce
- **Northern Tier CEDS – Goal 4:** Strengthening the Regional Workforce

12. Procurement Schedule

The anticipated procurement schedule for this RFP is outlined below. NTRPDC reserves the right to modify this schedule as necessary.

Milestone	Date
RFP Issued	January 12, 2026
Letter of Intent to Apply	January 19, 2026
Deadline for Written Questions	January 23, 2026
Responses to Questions	January 26, 2026
Proposal Submission Deadline	February 16, 2026
Proposal Review Period	February 17-20, 2026
Consultant Selection & Notification	February 23-27, 2026
Project Start Date	March 1, 2026

13. Questions

A letter of intent to apply and questions regarding this RFP should be directed to Melissa Fleming fleming@northerntier.org. Questions will be accepted no later than 4:00 p.m. **January 23, 2026**. Subject line should read: RFP Questions. Responses to all inquiries will be compiled and sent to all parties that submitted a letter of intent for this RFP by January 26.

14. Submission Instructions

Proposals including corresponding attachments must be submitted to NTRPDC no later than 4:00 p.m. February 16, 2026. Submissions must be emailed to fleming@northerntier.org with subject line: INSPIRE RFP

15. Award Decisions and Rejection of Proposals

Following the completion of all evaluations, an evaluation committee will recommend the highest-scoring proposer for a contract award.

NTRPDC reserves the right to negotiate with the selected proposer to refine the scope of work, deliverables, and contract terms. NTRPDC reserves the right to waive informalities and irregularities in proposals received, and to accept any portion of any proposal or all items proposed if deemed in the best interest of the conduct of the study. Only chosen contractors will be notified. All proposals received will be retained by NTRPDC.

The award decision will be based on the best overall value, considering qualifications, proposed service delivery approach, and cost-effectiveness.

Those not selected will be given an opportunity to file an appeal of their rejection, in writing, to the Executive Director. All disputes will be reviewed by the Executive Director with a written response in (20) days. If appealed, NTRPDC's Executive Board will be the final decision maker.

All procurement appeals will be handled in accordance with applicable federal procurement standards and NTRPDC's written procurement procedures.

Attachments: Budget, Budget Narrative, Work Plan and Timeline, Conflict of Interest, Debarment and Suspension Certification, Insurance Certification.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

In accordance with Public Law 101-166, Section 511, known as the Steven's Amendment, this Request for Proposal (RFP) is 100% funded with Federal funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act (WIOA). Detailed information can be found at www.northerntier.org