GO Virginia April 2019 Proposal Executive Summary:

Demand for renewable energy from the private sector is rapidly increasing. As utility-scale solar development on forested or agricultural lands encounters public opposition, previously impacted or degraded lands like the mined lands in far Southwest Virginia, are widely considered an ideal location for large solar projects. The Solar Jobs, Manufacturing and Utility-Scale Investment Playbook for Far Southwest Virginia will be a highly actionable, data-based analysis that identifies specific pathways for large-scale solar-related investment and employment opportunities in Southwest Virginia. The Playbook will provide local decision makers with a detailed market analysis and local asset-leveraging resources, including policy, planning, and educational support, to attract and retain significant investments in the solar supply chain related to manufacturing and utility-scale solar developments. Emphasis will be placed on maximizing lasting economic impact from out-of-state investments. Specific attention will be given to identifying opportunities at the intersection of IT/data centers or manufacturing facilities and on-site solar generation. The market analysis findings will inform a workforce training and credential gap assessment, which will identify current and future credentialing needs, and how those needs may be addressed either through existing or new training and certification pathways.

This capacity building project will be coordinated by the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia, a collaborative effort formed as a result of the 2016 SWVA Economic Forum that is utilizing solar industry development in the region as an economic catalyst. The Workgroup is co-convened by Appalachian Voices, People Incorporated of Southwest Virginia, and The University of Virginia’s College at Wise Office of Economic Development and Engagement, with professional facilitation from Dialogue + Design Associates. Participating entities include county governments, school districts, community colleges, planning districts, industry, nonprofits, and interested citizens.

The GO Virginia Region One Economic Growth and Diversification Plan cites national Q1 2017 data indicating the annual average wage in solar electric power generation was $104,088—more than triple the Region One average of $33,856. The Plan also cites the opportunity of locating solar developments on former coal mining areas in its SWOT analysis (p. 94-95). Additionally, solar development as an economic catalyst has been included in local development plans both before and since the establishment of the Workgroup.

Key audiences for the Playbook will be local government leaders and support organizations and institutions. The Playbook will be developed for and with strong collaboration from local government and the economic development community in the PDC 1 and 2 footprint. Locality engagement will be integrated within the currently underway SolSmart designation, complementing the objectives of that program, which is administered through the U.S. Department of Energy, International County/City Management Association, and The Solar Foundation.

The Solar Jobs, Manufacturing and Utility-Scale Investment Playbook for Far Southwest Virginia project intersects three target industry sectors identified by GO Virginia: Advanced Manufacturing, Energy and Minerals, and Information Technology. As a result of this strategic convergence, the project is uniquely suited for GO Virginia funding and for attracting investment, creating jobs, and supporting systemic economic transformation in the coalfield region of Southwest Virginia.
ARC Power 2019 Proposal Summary:

In this Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER Initiative Technical Assistance proposal, Appalachian Voices describes our project to refine and bring to scale the commercial-scale solar group purchase program developed and facilitated by the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia. This request will fund a third commercial-scale solar group purchase program cycle in Southwest Virginia, and the simultaneous multi-state collaboration convened through the Central Appalachian Network (CAN) to expand the program model we’ve developed in Virginia to other coal-impacted Central Appalachian states. A coalition ARC Implementation proposal will be developed for the POWER Initiative’s 2020 cycle that would fund commercial-scale solar group purchase programs in multiple Central Appalachian states, with facilitation by state-specific partner organizations and coordination through CAN.

This Technical Assistance request will also fund a multi-state market analysis as well as a solar project finance ecosystem assessment completed by an outside consultant that will inform the Implementation proposal and the work ahead.