

Appalachian Council of Governments SERVICES CONTINUE DURING COVID-19





Dear Appalachian COG Communities and Partners,

I hope that you, your families, and communities are keeping safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this challenging time, the Appalachian Council of Governments is continuing to provide services to our citizens and communities while taking precautions to ensure the safety of our clients and staff. Our office has been closed since mid-March and will remain closed at least through late May. In accordance with Governor McMaster's Executive Order 2020-21, employees are working remotely and operating under normal business hours with minimal on-site staff.

We are available to connect via remote teleconferencing options and other communication platforms to conduct business and maintain services to all our communities. Aging Services are our most essential operations and we understand needs are changing as a result of COVID-19. Our staff and partners have been doing an outstanding job of making sure seniors are receiving meals and other critical services. The information included in this report is intended to provide a brief update on all of our services during the pandemic. If you have any questions, or if ACOG can help your community in any way, please let us know.

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Economic Development

The Economic Development programs primary role is support of regional economic development efforts through delivery of the InfoMentum suite of economic information services. Although work has continued in many ways in March, economic development activity has understandably slowed during this period. Staff has continued to assist local economic developers with requests for information and research requests and are keeping in touch with local representatives to ensure continuity of service. In addition, staff is using this time look for ways to expand and enhance InfoMentum's web application and the investor's web applications. This has resulted in updates to 14 of the [Regional Data Center](#) dashboards and the creation of two new ones. As we proceed we will continue use our time to look for ways to improve our resources while also responding to our local economic developers requests until we can resume normal operations.

Government Services

Government Services staff is continuing to assist communities throughout the region. Staff is assisting the Town of Pelzer and City of Pickens with their budgets process. They also provide weekly support to the new City of Pickens Administrator via virtual meetings and some in-office assistance, primarily helping with development of the FY21 budget and personnel issues. We have also assisted the Town of Pacolet with the recruitment and interview process for a new police chief through online interviews and committee discussions. Staff also worked with the City of Greer on an online survey of employees to identify qualities desired for their next administrator. Following meetings with management and leadership staff, and with the survey results, a report was provided to the City to help them with their process to select a new city administrator later this year. Social distancing and limited work environments creates many challenges for municipal and county leadership in the region. Staff is available during this time to provide technical assistance. If you need help with a specific issue or just someone to help think through how to address these challenges do not hesitate to contact our office for assistance.

Grant Services

Grant Services staff continue to manage 23 grant projects throughout the region in various phases of construction. Staff have worked with State Department of Commerce staff to manage administrative requirements and monitor project progress through online meetings and tools to overcome the barriers created by current distancing guidelines. There are ongoing projects in every county: Anderson (5), Cherokee (2), Greenville (1), Oconee (4), Pickens (3) and Spartanburg (7).

In addition to these projects, nine grant applications have been finalized and submitted. These projects include the City of Anderson Innovate Kitchen and the Powdersville Water District S. Fishtrap & Hwy 88 Connector Transmission Mains in Anderson County, the Walhalla Greenway in Oconee County, the Central Trail, Liberty Action Plan, Liberty Rices Creek Lift Station, Liberty Lift Stations, the Pickens WWTP UV Disinfection System in Pickens County, and the Greer Commission of Public Works - Pump Station Replacement in Spartanburg County.

Planning and Transportation Services

Planning Services staff is involved in several projects with local communities during this time, including Comprehensive Plan updates in Inman, Reidville, and Cowpens. We have developed online surveys for each community to gather public input while social distancing is in place. Staff is also working with Woodruff and Anderson County on Zoning Ordinance and Land Development Regulation updates.

ACOG's administration of the Anderson HOME Consortium's activities continue as well as rehabilitation projects, although a reduction in crews available has slowed the pace of construction. The development of the Anderson HOME Consortium's 5-Year Consolidated Plan update is scheduled for submission by the May 15th deadline.

Work on transportation related activities is also moving forward with staff's kickoff of the Regional Freight Mobility Plan. Biweekly online meetings with the consultant started in March. We have developed a plan for a virtual meeting process for the Steering Committee and an initial invitation to participate has gone out to individuals selected to serve on the committee. There has been positive response to the invitations and the hope is to hold the initial meeting in late May or early June.



Senior Advocacy | Area Agency on Aging

Seniors are the hardest hit by this situation and the Appalachian Area Agency on Aging is working hard to advocate for older adults, support providers and coordinate with state and federal officials on critical services and programs. With many regional services and support programs for older adults closed or limited due to COVID-19, staff is actively engaging providers and seniors to mitigate the impacts and continuing to work to ensure essential services are provided to seniors in our region.

Family Caregiver Support Program

Family Caregiver Support Program advocates are still issuing vouchers to family caregivers who need relief and to grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Our advocates continue to authorize in-home services subject to the availability of providers. Some clients have requested to suspend services during the COVID19 pandemic so the advocates are extending their voucher dates. More federal funds have been allocated to our region to help with the increased demand during this crisis.

Home Care Program

The Home Care program is still operational. Initially, some seniors chose to suspend their in-home services and some providers were cautious about providing services at the outset of the COVID19 crisis. Many have since requested to have services begin again and providers are ramping up efforts as they learn how to mitigate impacts and protect clients while providing services. While there is a long wait list for the home care program, we are working to add clients as quickly as possible.



Information and Referral

Information and Referral Specialists are responding to the many calls we get every day. The call volume has remained consistent throughout this event. The majority of calls have been clients seeking home delivered meals since seniors are encouraged to stay at home and out of the grocery stores. Our staff have added many to the list for the appropriate home delivered meal program in our region.

Nutrition Program

All congregate meal sites in the region have been closed due the COVID19 pandemic. Staff has worked with meal providers throughout the region to coordinate distribution of home delivered meals to all of those clients who attended congregate meal sites. In February, we served a total of 22,720 meals (home delivered and congregate). In March, that number grew almost 11% to 25,215 and another increase for April is anticipated. We have also reacted to the increased need by increasing the 5 daily meals per week provided to 7 daily meals per week during this COVID19 event.

Seniors Provided with Home Delivered Meals During March 2020

County	Meals	
Anderson County	4,889	Currently, we are providing 7 meals/week vs. the normal 5 meals/week.
Cherokee County	3,270	
Greenville County	7,009	*Mobile Meals in Spartanburg County is providing all
Oconee County	3,437	home delivered meals through their own funding. ACOG
Pickens County	4,054	is only providing the congregate meals to Spartanburg
Spartanburg County	2,556*	County during this time.

Ombudsman Program

In-facility Ombudsman visits to long term care facilities have been suspended throughout the state. However, our Ombudsman are still hard at work fielding calls, working cases and advocating for older adults in these facilities. While no face-to-face case work or visits can be conducted the call volume has drastically increased with Ombudsman. Our team is remaining vigilant and doing what they do best by responding to issues and being a resource for residents and administrators to lean on during this time. Please continue to forward concerns or cases to our team at 1-800-434-4036.

If you need assistance from one of our staff members please visit our website at www.scacog.org/staff or call us at 864.242.9733 and you will be directed to someone who can help.