

Council of Governments FAQ

TOP 20 QUESTIONS

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1. What is a Council of Governments?

A Council of Governments (COG) is a structured body that allows for multiple political subdivisions to enter into an agreement to address issues of common concern. COGs are regulated by Ohio Revised Code Chapter 167.

2. What is the purpose of this COG?

The mission of this COG, the Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA), is to integrate conservation, outdoor recreation, and economic development in an efficient way that strengthens and inspires communities in Southeast Ohio.

A well-structured COG also has the ability to manage assets to maximize benefits to Athens County and the region’s economies and communities. It will provide a structure for for-profits, non-profits, and agencies to connect, fund projects, apply for grants, and voice concerns. It will build efficiencies in the management of public lands and across previously siloed efforts.

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3. Why is a COG needed to support and manage outdoor recreation in Athens?

- Immediate Need: The Baileys Trail System is an \$11 million project with over 50 organizations, businesses, non-profits, and government agencies that "touch" the trail system in some form or fashion. It needs a central planner to manage, organize, and resolve concerns. A COG serves that purpose.
- Longer term need: Currently, no entity in the Athens County Region:
 - Manages trans-boundary outdoor recreation infrastructure effectively
 - Treats outdoor recreation as an economic tool
 - Connects governments, industry, and non-profits to promote outdoor recreation
 - Provides a forum for diverse voices or to mitigate against any risks or concerns of the community.

Existing organizations in Athens County only provide those capabilities individually. A COG can be structured to integrate and leverage these assets so that the sum is greater than its parts.

4. What is the name?

Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA).

5. What is the responsibility of ORCA?

Proposed responsibilities include:

- Oversee and advise programs budget and contacts
- Ensure operations and maintenance of trails including trailhead parking
- Invest in future projects
- Apply for and distribute grants
- Manage branding and website

6. Is all of this for the "Mountain Biking Trail"?

No. While the Baileys Trail System has highlighted the need for a COG, ORCA will serve a range of future outdoor recreation opportunities across Athens County. It will promote better stewardship of existing recreation assets and enable investment into follow on projects. For example, ORCA could enable future investment such as put-ins on the Hocking River for water sports or the acquisition of a rock face on the Ohio River for rock climbing.

7. Who are the members of ORCA?

The proposed original members are

- Athens County
- City of Athens
- City of Nelsonville
- Ohio University
- Village of Chauncey
- Village of Buchtel
- York Township

8. Is membership limited to the original members?

No. ORCA has the potential to scale. Any municipal corporation, county or township in the State of Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties, as designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission, may apply to become a Member of ORCA.

9. Why would a government join ORCA?

A government would join ORCA because there is benefit and little to no cost. It provides an ability to ensure that their constituency can influence policy and management of outdoor recreation in the region, including the Baileys Trail System.

10. Does joining ORCA necessitate a financial commitment?

No, membership does not require nor demand a financial commitment. The size of members and the financial standing of members varies widely, therefore no fee is required. While there may be future operations costs for ORCA, forming ORCA and joining ORCA does not require a financial commitment from any specific member.

11. How will ORCA be funded?

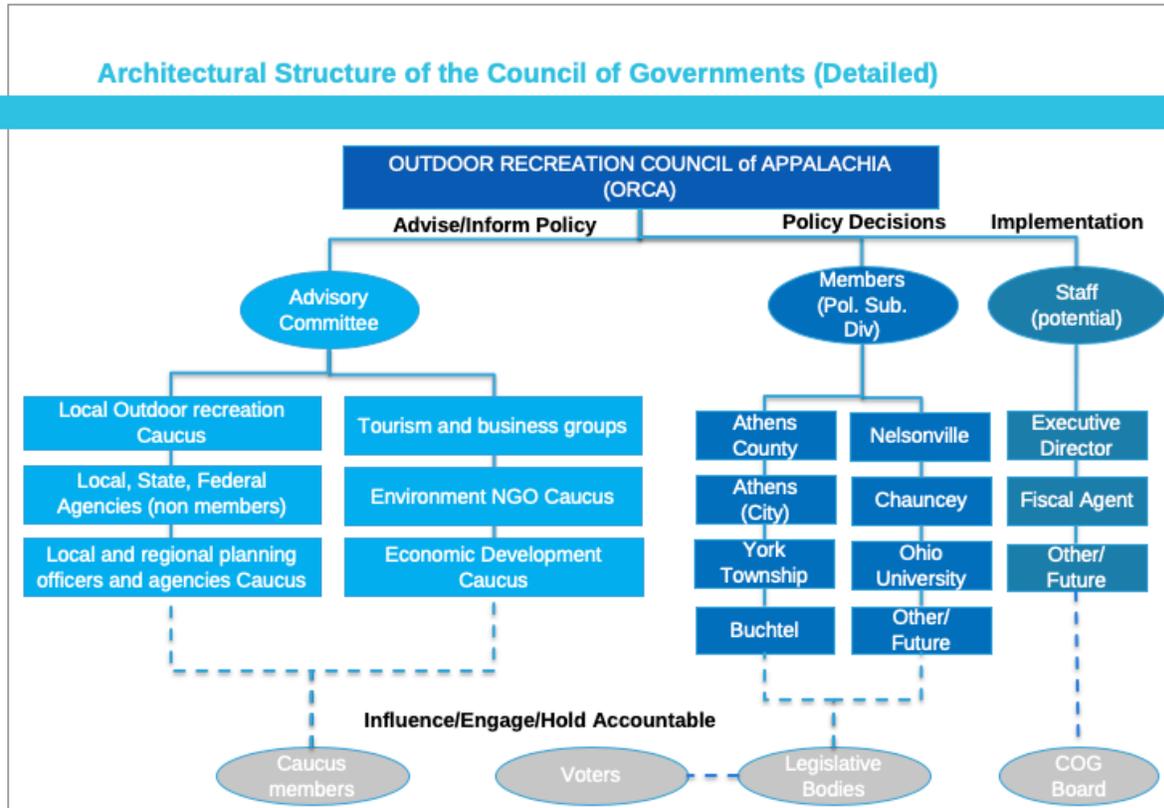
The Baileys Trail System financing plan provides funding for ORCA's first few years of operation. After the first few years, there are strong opportunities to lower the burden on members. Note, these are potential opportunities, not commitments.

- Cost sharing agreements with the US Forest Service could lower the burden on staffing and recreational maintenance costs.
- Partnerships with organizations like Buckeye Hills Regional Council could help fund staff positions.
- Relationships with the Trail Fund, nested in the Athens County Foundation, could help fund operational needs.
- Public funds such as member commitments and grants.
- Philanthropic Sponsors such as the Athens County Foundation's Trail Fund.
- Revenue from parking, projects, or sales of goods.

12. How will ORCA be structured?

The proposed structure will consist of 4 components:

- Members
- Board of Directors
- Advisory committee: Advise and inform policy
- Staff (potential): Day to Day operations and implementation



13. Who serves on the COG Advisory Committee?

The Advisory Committee or similar collaborative forum is a consensus-based policy forum to support ORCA. The Advisory Committee consists of members selected by and representing the following caucuses:

- Local outdoor recreation groups
- Local, state, and federal agencies
- Local and regional planning officers and agencies
- Economic development groups
- Environment groups
- Tourism and business groups
- Other local interested parties

14. If the COG uses public funds, how will it be accountable to the City of Athens?

The COG will be held accountable to the City of Athens in two ways. First, The COG can only use funds that are authorized to be used by the COG. In the case of Athens, the City Council would have to approve funding to the COG under the same accountability laws as any other funding. Secondly, the mayor of Athens will serve as a member of the board of the COG, providing a “voice” for Athens.

15. How will it ensure the voices of the community are heard?

- Through membership on the legislative body of the COG. A community whose government joins ORCA will have a voting member on the council.
- Through the advisory committee.

16. Can non-profits join ORCA?

A non-profit cannot join as a member, because a member must be a political subdivision. That said, a non-profit could be a part of the Advisory Committee and ensure that their voice is heard.

17. Will it have staff?

It is not required to have staff, but once the financing for Baileys Trail System and community partnerships are in place, an executive director would ensure effective operations.

18. Why not form some other entity to manage outdoor recreation?

Other entities that attempt to meet that need, such as a county parks department or a Parks District, are less effective. They are constrained by municipal borders. Additionally, these vehicle's focus is solely on maintenance and development of trails rather than the collaboration that outdoor recreation needs to be successful such as marketing, industry expertise, and local job training. An entity needs to manage and coordinate these various projects, contracts, and skillsets. A COG is the best vehicle to meet that need.

19. Are COGs common? Is Athens a part of other COG?

Yes, and Yes. We have identified over 25 COGs in Ohio. The City of Athens is a part of at least two COGS, Buckeye Hills and SOPEC.

20. What about similar forms to manage outdoor recreation? Or manage outdoor recreation on federal land?

- Offices of Outdoor Recreation: increasingly governments are creating offices that serve as conveners to promote the economic impact of outdoor recreation. Almost all of these offices are trying to coordinate across or blend the functions of economic development, tourism, and public land management.
- Other County and Municipal Examples
 - Gunnison County's Sustainable Tourism and Recreation (STOR);
 - Brevard Conservancy;
 - Mammoth Lakes Recreation.