



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies Consultant

Proposal Release Date: Thursday, August 15, 2024

Proposal Due: Monday, September 16, 2024 at 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time

Responses received after this time shall not be considered and will not be opened.

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Friends of Southwest Virginia, in partnership with Virginia’s Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) office, is seeking a consultant to provide strategic support for Virginia and partnering states participating in the Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE). The initiative aims to enhance opportunities for multi-state projects that build a competitive workforce, foster entrepreneurial activities, develop industry clusters, enhance broadband access, and preserve the region’s cultural heritage and natural assets.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Friends of Southwest Virginia (Friends) is seeking contractual support for the role of Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies Consultant. The consultant will develop a strategy for engaging strategic partners in Central Appalachia ARC states, identifying key stakeholders and potential project ideas to enhance multi-state collaboration. Additionally, the consultant will provide insights to Friends of Southwest Virginia to support the Virginia ARC region in preparing grant applications and ensure the successful execution of ARISE-funded projects.

The consultant will be responsible for developing a strategy for engaging partners from Central Appalachia ARC states (Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, and North Carolina), identifying key stakeholders, and proposing potential project ideas for collaboration. This includes providing detailed plans on who to meet with and specific project concepts to pursue. The consultant will also provide recommendations for topics for a multi-state conference. Additionally, the consultant will offer insights and recommendations to Friends of Southwest Virginia to support the Virginia ARC region in preparing strong ARISE grant applications. The consultant will also suggest relevant creative economy topics and themes for a multi-state conference. Ensuring the successful completion of ARISE-funded projects, including troubleshooting issues with projects administered by ARC or other agencies, is another critical responsibility. Finally, the consultant will produce comprehensive reports on any stakeholder meetings and engagement activities and develop a robust strategy for establishing strategic partnerships across Central Appalachia ARC states.

PROJECT TIMELINE

- **RFP Open Date:** August 15, 2024
- **RFP Proposal Due Date:** September 16, 2024
- **Consultant Selection Date:** October 25, 2024
- **Contract Period:** November 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

PROJECT BACKGROUND

About the Central Appalachian Region

The Appalachian Regional Commission defines Appalachia as a 205,000 square-mile region along and around the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and portions of: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. More than 25 million people live in Appalachia and reflect a diverse collection of cultures, economies, and demographics.

The scope of this project is limited to selecting Appalachian counties in Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. Much of the project region historically built economies and communities reliant on extractive industries largely related to energy. As the national and global energy economy shifts, Appalachian communities have increasingly begun to explore diversified economic strategies to address the challenges they

face, including high and persistent rates of poverty, poor public infrastructure, limited human capacity, and negative population growth. Over time, some Appalachian communities have experienced success in their diversification efforts, while others continue to grapple with multiple and intersecting challenges.

About Friends of Southwest Virginia

Friends of Southwest Virginia is an organization dedicated to advancing economic development, cultural preservation, and community vitality across the southwestern region of Virginia. As a nonprofit entity, it collaborates closely with various stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, and community organizations, to foster sustainable growth and enhance quality of life in the area. The organization is deeply committed to promoting the unique cultural heritage and natural assets of Southwest Virginia, while also supporting initiatives that build a competitive workforce, foster entrepreneurship, and improve infrastructure. Through strategic partnerships and innovative projects, Friends of Southwest Virginia strives to create a vibrant and resilient community that thrives economically and celebrates its rich cultural identity.

IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTANT

The consultant plays a crucial role within the Friends of Southwest Virginia team by bringing specialized expertise in strategic partnership development and project execution across Central Appalachia ARC states. They provide essential guidance in identifying key stakeholders and fostering collaborative relationships to advance multi-state projects that align with the goals of the Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE). Their insights and recommendations on grant application strategies enhance the team's capacity to secure funding for vital economic development initiatives in Virginia ARC regions. Overall, their contributions are instrumental in driving sustainable economic growth, fostering community resilience, and preserving cultural heritage within Appalachia.

SCOPE OF WORK

Responsibilities Include:

- **Developing Strategic Partnerships:** Creating a strategy for Friends of Southwest Virginia to engage with key stakeholders and potential partners from Central Appalachia ARC states, identifying opportunities for collaboration and project development.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Provide recommendations to Friends of Southwest Virginia how schedule and meeting format for stakeholders outside of Virginia.
- **Grant Application Support:** Providing insights and recommendations to enhance Friends of Southwest Virginia's support for Virginia ARC regions in preparing and submitting grant applications, ensuring alignment with funding requirements and objectives.
- **Multi-State Conference Recommendations** – Provide recommendations on topics and themes for Friends of Southwest Virginia to host a multi-state conference or event.

Deliverables:

1. **Reporting and Strategy Development:** Generating comprehensive reports on recommended stakeholder engagement activities and project progress, while also developing a cohesive strategy for establishing and maintaining strategic partnerships within the Central Appalachia ARC states. *(Please note that this deliverable focuses on both reporting on current activities (stakeholder engagement and project progress) and developing a broader strategy for establishing and maintaining strategic partnerships within Central Appalachia ARC states. It's about ongoing documentation and forward planning.)*

2. **Comprehensive Strategy for Strategic Partnerships:** A detailed strategy outlining approaches for engaging partners from Central Appalachia ARC states, including identified stakeholders and proposed project ideas for collaboration. *(Please note, this deliverable is more focused on creating a detailed plan for how to engage with partners in Central Appalachia, including identifying stakeholders and proposing specific projects for collaboration. It's less about reporting on current activities and more about outlining future engagement strategies.)*
3. **Recommendations on Grant Application Support:** Insights and recommendations provided to Friends of Southwest Virginia on how best to support Virginia ARC regions in preparing and submitting successful grant applications.
4. **Recommendations for Multi-State Conference Themes:** Offer suggestions on conference or event themes around the creative economy that would effectively bring together partners from Central Appalachia.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Friends of Southwest Virginia will select a consultant through a competitive process based on the evaluation of proposals using the Virginia Public Procurement Act's definition of "best value," meaning "the overall combination of quality, price, and various elements of required services that in total are optimal relative to a public body's needs." As defined in Section 2.2-4301 of the Code of Virginia's Virginia Public Procurement Act.

- Strong, demonstrated ability to facilitate, motivate, and track multiple, interconnected, remote groups;
- Clear and effective verbal and written communication skills;
- Ability to organize and synthesize key takeaways from large discussions;
- Comfort with remote and/or cloud-based working tools including Zoom, AI notetaker, Microsoft programs, etc.;
- High attention to detail;
- Experience with federal grant requirements, reporting, and project management;
- Comfort with providing thoughtful, balanced, and firm guidance and support for project participants and lead partners as needed;
- Understanding of issues of equity, community engagement, and inclusivity in an Appalachian context;
- Experience in community and economic development; and
- Experience working with Appalachian and/or rural and/or economically distressed communities.

INSTRUCTIONS TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL – PLEASE FOLLOW LAYOUT INSTRUCTIONS

All responsible bidders/offerors should submit the following documents and information:

1. Narrative (1-2 pages) describing:
 - Background and qualifications related to this scope of services.
 - Experience coordinating projects and how this prior work will info this initiative.
 - Experience in working with multi-state projects and with ARC ARISE projects.
 - Approach to project management and proposed milestones to accomplishing this work.
2. Budget that defines deliverables, rates and proposed payment schedule (please note that the budget cap for this scope of services over the 12-month period, including all expenses, is \$25,000)
3. Resume(s) for key personnel.
4. Two references, including:
 - Name, Title, Organization, and Contact Information

Please submit responses via email no later than Monday, September 16, 2024, at 5:00pm EST to Kim Davis, Executive Director of Friends of Southwest Virginia at kdavis@myswva.org with the subject line: "Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies Consultant." Questions may be submitted in writing via email no later than September 6, 2024 at 5:00pm EST to Kim Davis.