



**Southwest Virginia Creative Economy
Assessment & Development Initiative
*Request for Proposal (RFP)***

**Issued by: Friends of Southwest Virginia
Proposal Deadline: January 21, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. EST**



December 17, 2025

Dear Prospective Vendor,

Over the past two decades, Southwest Virginia has made strategic and sustained investments in cultivating a vibrant creative economy as a driver of regional economic development. As these efforts have matured, the need for a comprehensive evaluation of our region's creative assets and their economic impact has become increasingly clear.

Friends of Southwest Virginia is pleased to announce the release of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Assessment and Development Initiative. This initiative will serve as a pivotal step forward in assessing our creative economy's scope, contributions, and potential, while providing stakeholders with essential tools and insights for future planning and investment.

The selected contractor(s) will be responsible for executing a comprehensive scope of work that includes asset mapping, economic analysis, stakeholder engagement, the development of an interactive Creative Economy Dashboard, and the creation of a 10-year strategic roadmap. These components will collectively support informed decision-making and help guide sustainable, data-driven growth across Southwest Virginia.

This initiative not only addresses a long-standing need for updated and thorough analysis—our last creative economy strategy was completed more than a decade ago—but also reinforces our commitment to economic resilience and cultural vibrancy. By engaging leaders across government, business, tourism, education, and the arts, we seek to build collaborative momentum toward a shared vision for the region's future.

The RFP that follows outlines the project scope, expectations, deliverables, and submission requirements. This project is supported in part by federal funding, including the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and must adhere to applicable federal procurement standards (2 CFR Part 200). Respondents must demonstrate capacity to meet these requirements. Proposals are due Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 12:00 PM EST and must be submitted electronically in PDF format.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to the opportunity to collaborate in shaping the next chapter of Southwest Virginia's creative economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Davis".

Kimberly Davis
Executive Director

Request for Proposal

Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Assessment and Development Initiative

1. INTRODUCTION

Friends of Southwest Virginia ("Friends") invites qualified contractors, consultants, and firms to submit proposals to support the implementation of the Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Assessment and Development Initiative. Friends recognizes the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the region's creative assets and their economic impact. This initiative aims to address this imperative by undertaking a rigorous assessment and establishing essential tools for informed decision-making.

Through a systematic approach encompassing asset mapping, economic analysis, the development of a Creative Economy Dashboard, and crafting a strategy for the next decade, this initiative will provide stakeholders with actionable insights to guide strategic planning and future resource allocation. By engaging stakeholders from diverse sectors, including government, business, tourism, education, and the arts, the project will foster collaboration and collective action to capitalize on the region's creative economy potential.

2. BACKGROUND

Friends of Southwest Virginia supports economic development across 19 counties, four cities, and 53 towns through cultural and outdoor tourism initiatives. Over the last decade, the region has seen measurable growth in visitation thanks to strategic initiatives.

Friends of Southwest Virginia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a sustainable creative economy that leverages the region's heritage and natural resources to create jobs, support tourism, and attract new businesses. This project will serve coal-impacted communities across 18 counties and four cities across the region. Through extensive stakeholder engagement, data-driven research, and strategic planning, the project aims to foster job creation, entrepreneurship, community revitalization, and long-term sustainability.

3. PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the impact of Southwest Virginia's creative economy over the past 10 years
- Identify and map key cultural and recreational assets
- Conduct a comprehensive economic analysis of the creative economy sector
- Engage stakeholders and foster partner collaboration
- Generate actionable recommendations for regional economic growth
- Create a 10-year Strategic Roadmap for creative economy development

4. SCOPE OF WORK

The selected firm will be expected to:

- Conduct comprehensive research and data gathering to understand Southwest Virginia's cultural and outdoor recreation landscape and identify key stakeholders
- Evaluate the impact of the creative economy over the past decade
- Develop a detailed asset map of cultural institutions, heritage sites, and outdoor recreation areas
- Conduct an economic analysis including employment, revenue, and GDP contributions
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement through workshops, interviews, and focus groups
- Synthesize data and stakeholder input to generate strategic, actionable recommendations
- Implement documentation, reporting, and coordination processes to ensure effective project management
- Develop evaluation and monitoring tools to measure implementation success
- Provide ongoing stakeholder support and identify opportunities for future funding and sustainability
- Create a comprehensive Strategic Roadmap to guide regional creative economy development over the next decade

5. PROJECT PHASES

The project will proceed through the following phases:

I. Initial Research and Data Gathering

- Collect and assess data on the cultural and outdoor recreation landscape
- Identify stakeholders and existing creative economy assets

II. Creative Economy Asset Mapping

- Use GIS and related tools to document cultural institutions, heritage sites, and recreation areas
- Build a publicly accessible inventory

III. Economic Analysis

- Analyze employment, revenue, and GDP impact of the creative economy
- Identify trends, opportunities, and challenges

IV. Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

- Host workshops, interviews, and focus groups
- Foster partnerships and gather local insights

V. Development of a Strategic Roadmap

- Translate data and analysis into a 10-year actionable strategic plan
- Gather stakeholder input through facilitated sessions

VI. Actionable Recommendations

- Develop strategies for job creation, entrepreneurship, and revitalization
- Prioritize project objectives

VII. Documentation and Reporting

- Produce clear documentation of methodology and findings
- Prepare reports and presentations for stakeholders

VIII. Project Management and Coordination

- Define project timelines, deliverables, and responsibilities
- Maintain progress tracking and coordination throughout implementation

IX. Evaluation and Monitoring

- Build a framework for assessing impact and effectiveness
- Share best practices and learning across the region

X. Continued Support and Sustainability

- Offer follow-up support to implementing stakeholders
- Identify long-term funding sources and resource-sharing opportunities

6. DELIVERABLES

- Kickoff meeting and project work plan
- Comprehensive research and data report
- Regional Creative Economy Asset map
- Economic impact analysis
- Stakeholder engagement plan summary
- 10-Year Strategic Roadmap
- Actionable recommendations report
- Documentation and final report/presentations
- Sharing tools or templates for local tourism partners

7. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

To be considered, proposals must include the following information in the order listed below:

1. Firm Overview & Qualifications with Letter of Interest

Brief description of the firm, its capabilities, and relevant experience in market research, economic development and asset inventories.

2. Methodology & Tools

Detailed explanation of the proposed approach, including data collection methods, tools, and sources.

3. Relevant Project Experience

Examples of comparable work preferably involving regional tourism or destination marketing. Include outcomes and client references where applicable.

4. Project Team

Names, roles, and brief bios of team members assigned to the project, highlighting relevant expertise.

5. Project Timeline

Estimated schedule with key phases, deliverables, and milestone dates.

6. Budget Breakdown

A detailed budget.

7. References

Contact information for at least three professional references familiar with the firm's work on similar projects.

8. TIMELINE

This project is expected to be implemented within 18 months of contract signing, with major milestones including:

- Phase I: Research and Data Gathering
- Phase II: Mapping and Economic Analysis
- Phase III: Stakeholder Engagement
- Phase IV: Strategic Roadmap and Recommendations

9. BUDGET GUIDELINES

Proposals should include a detailed budget that accounts for:

- Data acquisition and software/tools
- Personnel time
- Travel and onsite activities
- Data analysis and field reporting
- Presentation and stakeholder engagement

All proposed costs must be reasonable, allowable, and allocable per federal grant guidelines under 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards). Friends reserves the right to negotiate final scope and budget with the selected vendor.

10. EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be evaluated by a selection committee using the following weighted criteria:

Criteria	Weight
Understanding of Project Scope and Vision	20 points
Methodology and Technical Approach	25 points
Relevant Experience and Qualifications	20 points
Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Clarity	15 points
Project Timeline and Feasibility	10 points
References and Past Performance	10 points
Total Possible Points	100

11. FEDERAL FUNDING & COMPLIANCE

This project is funded in part by the Appalachian Regional Commission and must adhere to all applicable federal regulations, including but not limited to 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance for Federal Awards). All proposed costs must be:

- Reasonable and necessary to project objectives
- Allowable and allocable under the grant
- Compliant with federal cost principles

Firms must demonstrate knowledge of or willingness to comply with federal procurement standards.

12. SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Submit proposals electronically in PDF format to (your PDF file should include your company name):

Catherine Fox

Director of Regional Destination Development

Friends of Southwest Virginia

cfox@myswva.org

(no phone calls)

Proposal Deadline: **January 21, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. EST**

Late submissions will not be considered. (no exceptions)

13. QUESTIONS

All questions must be submitted in writing to the contact above no later than January 9, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. EST

Important Note: Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals and to waive any informalities or irregularities in the proposals received. This RFP does not commit Friends of Southwest Virginia to award a contract, nor pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a proposal.



Appendix A

About Friends of Southwest Virginia

Mission - The mission of Friends of Southwest Virginia is to preserve, promote, and present the cultural and natural assets of Southwest Virginia; to work in partnership in the region to generate economic development through these efforts; to provide educational and cultural opportunities for the general public and students of the region; to showcase the cultural assets of SWVA at the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace (formerly Heartwood).

About Us - Friends of Southwest Virginia, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was established in 2-11 to operate alongside the Southwest Virginia Heritage Cultural Foundation and serve as the primary fiscal and operational body. The two organizations work in tandem under the leadership of a single Executive Director reporting to two separate boards that oversee their individual authorizations. The majority of the organization's employees, grant development programs, and all operations of the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace are housed within the non-profit.

Website - <http://friendsofswva.org/>