



Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Assessment & Development Initiative Q&A

January 14, 2026

Please note: *This Q and A document is intended to clarify the existing RFP and does not modify the scope, evaluation criteria, or submission requirements unless explicitly stated.*

1. Budget and Funding

- **Budget Guidance: Is there an allocated budget, an anticipated range, or a "not-to-exceed" amount for this 18-month scope?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia did not establish an allocated budget range or not-to-exceed amount for this project. This was intentional. We are seeking proposals that reflect each firm's professional assessment of the scope of work, level of effort, and resources required to deliver the initiative effectively over the 18-month period.

Funding for the project will come from multiple sources; however, proposers should base their submissions solely on the scope outlined in the RFP and provide a detailed, cost-effective budget that is reasonable, allowable, and allocable under 2 CFR Part 200. Friends reserves the right to negotiate final scope and budget with the selected firm.

- **Funding Status: Is the funding for this project fully in-hand with Friends of Southwest Virginia, and is there any risk to the funding commitment?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia has secured funding commitments to support this project and does not anticipate any material risk to the project moving forward. As noted in the RFP, funding for the initiative comes from multiple sources, including federal funding, and the project will proceed in compliance with applicable federal requirements.

The selected consultant will contract directly with Friends of Southwest Virginia. Any refinements to scope, phasing, or budget will be addressed during contract negotiations to ensure alignment with available funding and project objectives.

- **Eligible Costs: Should the proposal include ongoing maintenance costs for the dashboard or the cost of organizing and hosting all stakeholder meetings?**

Proposals should not include ongoing maintenance, hosting, or long-term operational costs for the Creative Economy Dashboard platform. As noted in the RFP, Friends of Southwest Virginia is exploring dashboard development through a separate entity, and the selected consultant is not expected to build, host, or maintain the platform. Proposals should include costs associated with planning, organizing, and facilitating stakeholder engagement activities that are within the consultant's proposed scope of work. This includes costs related to in-person workshops, meetings, and engagement sessions (e.g., facilitation, travel, materials, and related expenses). Venue costs or other regionally provided support may be coordinated in partnership with Friends of Southwest Virginia and will be discussed during contract finalization.



2. Data and Technical Requirements (Dashboard & Asset Map)

- **Existing Data: What datasets, asset inventories, GIS layers, or baseline economic data from the last 10 years are currently available and will be shared with the selected firm?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia will provide the selected firm with access to relevant existing data and materials that may support the project. These may include prior regional creative economy and tourism studies, publicly available GIS layers, and baseline economic and visitation data maintained by Friends and its partners.

However, proposers should not assume that existing datasets are comprehensive, current, or uniformly formatted. The selected firm is expected to evaluate the quality and applicability of available data and to supplement, update, or refine datasets as needed to fulfill the scope of work. Proposals should reflect an approach that integrates existing information where appropriate while accounting for additional data collection, validation, and analysis.

- **Dashboard Clarification: The "Creative Economy Dashboard" is mentioned in the introduction but not listed as a deliverable later in the RFP; can you clarify its status and intended use?**

The Creative Economy Dashboard is envisioned as a longer-term tool to support data transparency, monitoring, and decision-making related to the region's creative economy. While the dashboard is referenced in the introduction to provide context for the initiative's overall vision, the development, hosting, and ongoing maintenance of the dashboard platform itself are not included as required deliverables under this RFP.

The selected consultant's role is expected to focus on the analysis, data development, indicators, and frameworks that would inform and support future dashboard development. Proposals should describe how their work products, such as asset inventories, economic analysis, metrics, and reporting structures, could be structured to integrate with or inform a dashboard at a later stage, without assuming responsibility for building or operating the dashboard.

- **Platform Preferences: Does the organization have a preferred technical environment or software platform (e.g., ArcGIS Online, StoryMaps, Tableau) for the dashboard and asset map, or should the consultant recommend a solution?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia does not currently have a preferred technical environment or required software platform for the Creative Economy Dashboard or asset map. Proposers should not assume the use of any specific platform.

Consultants are encouraged to recommend appropriate tools, platforms, or technical approaches based on the project's analytical needs, data structure, accessibility considerations, and long-term usability. Any recommended solutions should be practical, scalable, and aligned with the understanding that dashboard platform development, hosting, and long-term maintenance are outside the required scope of this RFP.



- **Accessibility: Is the intent for the "Creative Economy Asset Map" to be accessed via the main website or another methodology?**

The intent is for the Creative Economy Asset Map to be publicly accessible and easily usable by a wide range of audiences, including regional partners, policymakers, and the general public. Friends of Southwest Virginia does not require a specific access method at this time.

Proposers may recommend an appropriate methodology for public access, such as web-based viewing, embeddable tools, or other user-friendly formats, consistent with the understanding that long-term hosting and maintenance of platforms are outside the required scope of this RFP. Any recommended approach should prioritize accessibility, clarity, and the ability for Friends or its partners to manage or transition the asset map following project completion.

- **Sector Integration: To what extent should "outdoor recreation" assets overlap with "cultural" assets in the final dashboard—are these viewed as separate or integrated sectors?**

Outdoor recreation and cultural assets are viewed as interconnected and complementary components of Southwest Virginia's broader creative economy. While each sector has distinct characteristics, the intent of this initiative is to understand how these assets collectively contribute to economic activity, community identity, tourism, and quality of place.

Proposals should reflect an integrated approach that recognizes overlaps and points of intersection between outdoor recreation and cultural assets, while still allowing for clear categorization and analysis of each sector where appropriate. The selected firm should recommend a framework that supports both sector-specific insights and cross-sector analysis to inform regional strategy and long-term decision-making.

3. Scope and Deliverables

- **Definition of Creative Economy: What is your specific definition of the creative economy, and what types of industries/sectors are included?**

For the purposes of this initiative, Friends of Southwest Virginia uses a broad and inclusive definition of the creative economy. It encompasses industries, occupations, and assets that draw on creativity, culture, heritage, place-based identity, and natural resources to generate economic value, employment, and community vitality.

This includes, but is not limited to, arts and crafts, music, performance, and traditional cultural expression; heritage, history, and cultural tourism; design, media, and digital content; creative services and entrepreneurship; foodways and culinary traditions; and outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism. Proposals should reflect an understanding of the creative economy as an interconnected ecosystem rather than a single sector.

Consultants may propose refined or working definitions as part of their methodology, provided they are appropriate to the region, grounded in best practice, and support the project's analytical and strategic objectives.



- **Evaluation Depth: Is the impact evaluation a general assessment of changes over the last 10 years, or should it evaluate the impacts of specific programs and initiatives?**

The primary intent of the impact evaluation is to assess broad changes and trends in Southwest Virginia's creative economy over the past 10 years, including economic, workforce, and place-based outcomes. The evaluation is not intended to be a formal performance audit of individual programs or initiatives.

However, where relevant and appropriate, the selected firm may reference illustrative examples of programs or initiatives to contextualize findings, highlight effective practices, or demonstrate sector dynamics. Proposals should focus on regional-level analysis and insights that inform long-term strategy rather than program-by-program evaluation.

- **Geographic Scope: Can you confirm the geographic scope is the 19-county and 4-city region.**

Yes. The geographic scope of this initiative is the 19-county and four-city region served by Friends of Southwest Virginia, as defined in the RFP.

The four cities included in the project footprint are Bristol, Galax, Norton, and Radford.

The 19 counties included are Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Craig, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe.

All analysis, engagement, and recommendations should be grounded in and applicable to this defined regional footprint. Where appropriate, proposals may also include subregional or community-level analysis to highlight variation, opportunities, or challenges within the region, provided such analysis supports the broader regional framework.

- **Strategic Alignment: Is the 10-year roadmap intended to position the region for a specific upcoming funding cycle or federal grant opportunity?**

No. The 10-year roadmap is intended to guide long-term visioning and strategic decision-making for Southwest Virginia's creative economy. It is not being developed to position the region for any specific upcoming funding cycle or federal grant opportunity.

Instead, the roadmap will provide a durable, data-informed framework to support sustained progress, coordination, and investment over time. While the roadmap may be used as a reference to inform future funding pursuits, its primary purpose is to support regional alignment and long-range strategy rather than near-term grant positioning.



- **Target Metrics: Does the region have specific targets for job creation or business attraction within the creative sector to use as a baseline?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia has established preliminary performance targets through prior regional planning and federally funded initiatives. These targets are intended to provide directional benchmarks rather than fixed or prescriptive goals for this assessment.

At a regional level, those benchmarks include job creation, job retention, business formation, business support, and community impact outcomes related to the creative economy and tourism sectors. These measures were developed to meet federal reporting requirements and reflect anticipated outcomes over a defined implementation period, not as definitive long-term targets for the 10-year roadmap.

For this initiative, the selected firm should treat existing targets as contextual reference points rather than required baselines. The primary expectation is that the consultant will assess current conditions, validate or refine baseline metrics, identify meaningful indicators, and recommend appropriate performance measures and potential targets informed by data analysis and stakeholder input. The 10-year roadmap should focus on establishing a realistic, data-driven framework for tracking progress over time rather than committing the region to predetermined numeric outcomes.

- **Add-On Options: Would Friends of SWVA be interested in "add-alternate" options, such as an Economic Impact Toolkit/Calculator?**

Yes. Friends of Southwest Virginia is open to considering value-added or add-alternate options that enhance the usefulness and longevity of the project's outcomes, such as an Economic Impact Toolkit or calculator.

Any proposed add-alternate should be presented as an optional component with a clearly defined scope, clear assumptions, and a separate line item in the budget. Add-alternates should be designed to complement the core scope of work outlined in the RFP and should not be required for a proposal to be considered responsive.

4. Stakeholder Engagement and Oversight

- **Steering Committee: Has a regional steering committee or working group already been established to guide the consultant, or is forming this group part of Phase I?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia will designate a primary staff point of contact to work day to day with the selected consultant. A regional steering committee is currently being assembled and will provide guidance, input, and oversight for the initiative.

The selected consultant should anticipate working closely with the steering committee once it is finalized. Forming or convening the steering committee is not expected to be a consultant responsibility under Phase I of this project.



- **Engagement Expectations: What level of stakeholder engagement is expected (e.g., number of interviews or workshops), and do you have a preference for in-person versus virtual sessions?**

Given the geographic scale of the region and the importance of inclusive participation, in-person stakeholder engagement is a requirement of this initiative. Virtual engagement may be used selectively and strategically but should not replace in-person workshops or meetings.

Friends of Southwest Virginia plans to host stakeholder engagement opportunities across all 19 counties and four independent cities within the project footprint. In addition, in-person meetings with stakeholders are expected to occur at multiple points throughout the project lifecycle, not solely during an initial engagement phase.

Proposers are expected to recommend an appropriate engagement approach, including the number, format, sequencing, and geographic distribution of sessions needed to achieve meaningful participation at both the regional and local levels. Proposals should reflect a thoughtful balance between depth of engagement and efficient use of project resources, while ensuring stakeholders across the full region have convenient access to engagement opportunities.

- **Point of Contact: Who will serve as the primary day-to-day point of contact for the consultant team?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia will assign a designated staff member to serve as the primary day to day point of contact for the selected consultant team. This individual will coordinate project communications, scheduling, and day to day decision making on behalf of the organization.

The selected consultant should anticipate working closely with this staff lead throughout the project, as well as engaging with the regional steering committee as appropriate.

- **Introductions: Will Friends of SWVA facilitate introductions with relevant regional stakeholders?**

Yes. Friends of Southwest Virginia will facilitate introductions to relevant regional stakeholders, including partners, local leaders, and members of the steering committee, as appropriate to support effective project implementation.

The selected consultant will be expected to collaborate with Friends to plan and conduct stakeholder outreach and engagement activities, with Friends providing coordination support and regional context as needed.

5. RFP Process and Proposal Logistics

- **Timeline: What is the timeline for proposal review, interviews, and final selection? Are you open to alternative timelines if the work can be completed faster?**

Proposals are due on January 21, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. EST, as stated in the RFP. Following the submission deadline, Friends of Southwest Virginia anticipates reviewing proposals promptly. Interviews may be conducted with shortlisted firms, if deemed necessary, and final selection is expected to occur shortly thereafter. The project is expected to be implemented within an 18-month period following contract execution, consistent with the timeline outlined in the RFP. While the overall project duration is defined, Friends of Southwest Virginia is open to considering alternative or accelerated timelines proposed by respondents, provided that all required scope elements and deliverables are fully addressed and the proposed approach supports meaningful stakeholder engagement and high-quality outcomes.

- **Submission Formatting: * Is there a required page limit for the proposal?**

No. There is no required page limit for proposals. Respondents are expected to organize and submit their proposals using the format and order outlined in the RFP. Proposals that do not follow the required format may be more difficult to evaluate and may receive lower scores under the applicable evaluation criteria.

- **Are 11" x 17" pages allowed for the project schedule?**

Yes. 11" x 17" pages may be included for the project schedule, provided they are clearly labeled and submitted within the same PDF as the full proposal. However, Friends of Southwest Virginia prefers that proposals use standard 8 1/2" x 11" pages whenever possible. Proposers should ensure that all materials remain legible when viewed electronically.

- **What is the maximum MB file size for email submission?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia does not have a specified maximum file size for proposal submissions. However, proposers should be mindful of common email system limitations. If a proposal file exceeds standard email size limits and cannot be delivered successfully, proposers should contact Friends of Southwest Virginia in advance of the submission deadline to coordinate an alternative method of submission.

- **Letters of Support: Please clarify the “letter of support” requirement—from whom are these required?**

Letters of support are not required as part of the proposal submission. Proposers may include letters of support or reference letters at their discretion if they believe such materials add value or context to their proposal, but they are not mandatory and will not be required for a proposal to be considered responsive. Proposals will be evaluated primarily on the criteria outlined in the RFP, including understanding of the project scope, methodology, qualifications, experience, and budget clarity.



- **Contracting Entity: Please confirm if the engaging party is the 501(c)(3) entity (Friends of SWVA) and if any other parties will be involved in the contract.**

Yes. The contracting and engaging party for this project will be Friends of Southwest Virginia, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The selected consultant will contract directly with Friends of Southwest Virginia.

While the project involves collaboration with regional partners and a steering committee, no other entities will be parties to the contract.

6. Reporting and Transparency

- **Audience Prioritization: If you were to prioritize the audience for the outcomes (Visitors, Residents, Community Leaders, Lawmakers, Funders, etc.), what would be the order?**

The primary audience for the outcomes of this initiative is regional and local decision makers, including community leaders, economic development practitioners, and partner organizations responsible for planning and implementation within Southwest Virginia. These audiences will use the findings, data, and roadmap to guide strategy, coordination, and investment.

Secondary audiences include funders and policymakers, who may use the outcomes to better understand regional conditions and inform future investment decisions. Residents and businesses, particularly those operating within the creative economy, are also important audiences for selected outputs related to transparency, engagement, and shared understanding of regional assets.

Visitors are considered an indirect audience for this work. While the initiative will inform long-term tourism and place-based strategies, it is not designed as a visitor-facing marketing product. Rather than optimizing outcomes for a single audience, the intent is to ensure that deliverables are structured in a way that supports multiple audiences while prioritizing those responsible for decision making and implementation.

- **Distribution: Will final reports be made available to the general public or shared specifically with funders and lawmakers?**

Final reports and key deliverables from this initiative are expected to be shared publicly to support transparency, regional learning, and broad awareness of the findings. Friends of Southwest Virginia also anticipates sharing materials with funders, policymakers, and partner organizations to inform decision making and future investment. Some supporting materials or interim working documents may be shared with specific audiences as appropriate, but the overall intent is for the primary findings and final outputs to be publicly accessible.



- **Branding: Does Friends of Southwest Virginia prefer a consultant-branded report or an organization-branded deliverable?**

Friends of Southwest Virginia prefers that final deliverables be branded primarily as organization-branded products of Friends of Southwest Virginia, with appropriate acknowledgment of the consultant's role. Consultant branding may be included in a professional and secondary manner, such as within an acknowledgments section or on an inside page, but the primary branding and presentation should reflect Friends of Southwest Virginia and the public nature of the initiative.