



**Friends of Southwest Virginia Business Planning  
& Strategic Development Services  
*Request for Proposal (RFP)***

**Issued by: Friends of Southwest Virginia**

**Issued on: February 5, 2026**

**Deadline: Friday, March 2, 2026**



February 5, 2026

Kimberly Davis, Executive Director  
Friends of Southwest Virginia  
One Heartwood Circle  
Abingdon, VA 24201

Dear Prospective Firm or Vendor,

Friends of Southwest Virginia (Friends) invites proposals from qualified firms or individuals to provide professional services for *Friends of Southwest Virginia Business Planning & Strategic Development Services*, a federally funded initiative focused on strengthening Friends' organizational capacity and regional leadership role. This engagement will support Friends' work in destination marketing, creative economy development, and long-term organizational sustainability in service to Southwest Virginia.

This procurement is funded in part with federal funds and must comply with all applicable requirements under 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards). Respondents should demonstrate experience with federally funded projects and the ability to meet compliance, documentation, and reporting requirements.

The enclosed Request for Proposals outlines the project background, anticipated scope of services, submission requirements, evaluation criteria, and procurement schedule. Proposals must be submitted electronically in PDF format no later than Monday, March 2, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing no later than Friday, February 13. Responses to all questions will be issued via written addendum.

We appreciate your interest in supporting this important work for Southwest Virginia and look forward to reviewing your proposal.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Davis  
Executive Director

# **Request for Proposal – Friends of Southwest Virginia Business Planning & Strategic Development Services**

## **1. Introduction**

Friends of Southwest Virginia is seeking qualified professional service providers to support business planning and strategic development services associated with a federally funded initiative. This engagement will focus on strengthening Friends’ organizational capacity, operational effectiveness, and regional leadership role. The selected consultant(s) will work closely with Friends staff, regional partners, and advisory stakeholders to develop practical, implementation-ready recommendations.

This RFP is issued as a competitive procurement in accordance with F CFR §200.320(b). Proposers may assemble multidisciplinary teams or engage subconsultants as needed; however, the prime consultant shall be fully responsible for all deliverables, coordination, and compliance with federal requirements.

## **2. Background**

Friends of Southwest Virginia is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving a 19-county and four-city region of Southwest Virginia. Friends serves as the regional destination marketing organization (DMO) for Southwest Virginia and as a regional convener, fiscal agent, and implementation partner for initiatives related to tourism, outdoor recreation, the creative economy, and community development.

In addition to its role as a DMO, Friends provides administrative, fiscal, and staffing support for key regional partner organizations and initiatives, including the Round the Mountain Artisan Network (RTM) and the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI). Through this backbone support model, Friends helps strengthen partner capacity, ensure compliance with state and federal requirements, and advance coordinated regional strategies.

Friends also operates the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace (Heartwood) and supports regional partner organizations and initiatives.

## **3. Project Objectives**

The objectives of this professional services engagement include:

- Supporting strategic business planning and organizational capacity development for Friends of Southwest Virginia
- Advancing regional creative economy and destination development initiatives
- Providing analysis, facilitation, and implementation-ready recommendations
- Ensuring alignment with federal funding requirements and regional economic development priorities

## **4. Scope of Work**

The selected consultant will be responsible for developing a comprehensive, implementation-ready Business Plan and Strategic Framework for Friends of Southwest Virginia. The scope of work must address organizational, operational, financial, and regional leadership functions, and at a minimum shall include the following components:

### **A. Organizational and Staffing Strategy**

- Assessment of current organizational structure, roles, and capacity
- Development of a phased staffing plan aligned with Friends’ regional responsibilities, including its role as a destination marketing organization (DMO) and regional backbone entity
- Recommendations related to staffing levels, role alignment, succession planning, and professional development

## **B. Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace (Heartwood) Operations**

- Development of an operations plan for the SWVA Cultural Center (Heartwood), including daily operations, facilities management, and visitor services
- Emergency preparedness and risk management planning for the facility
- Analysis of space utilization and operational efficiencies
- Assessment and recommendations related to the identity and naming of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace, including consideration of the Heartwood brand and alignment with visitor perception, regional branding, and operational goals

## **C. Event, Rental, and Facility Use Strategy**

- Review and recommendations for event booking, facility rentals, and use policies
- Development of standardized contract templates, fee structures, and rate schedules for space rentals and events
- Assessment of staffing, equipment, and operational costs associated with events and rentals

## **D. Retail and Artisan Gallery Business Strategy**

- Analysis of retail operations and artisan gallery performance at Heartwood
- Recommendations for merchandising, pricing, inventory management, commission structures, and revenue growth
- Strategies to strengthen artisan engagement and increase earned revenue

## **E. Destination Marketing Organization (Visit SWVA) Growth Strategy**

- Assessment of Friends' current destination marketing and destination development functions, including staffing, partner services, funding sources, and alignment with state and regional partners.
- Development of a Destination Marketing & Development Strategy that clearly defines Friends' role as the region's recognized Destination Marketing Organization, identifies priority markets and experiences, and aligns marketing, product development, and regional economic development objectives.
- Strategic roadmap to advance Friends' DMO function to an accreditation-ready, fully realized regional destination organization, consistent with Destinations International best practices, including recommendations related to organizational structure, staffing alignment, governance, and sustainable funding models.
- Recommendations to strengthen partner services and engagement, including participation models, service offerings, communications, and accountability mechanisms.
- Planning and prioritization of destination marketing campaigns, including implementation considerations, phasing, target audiences, coordination with existing marketing contractors, and performance measurement.
- Development of a performance measurement framework defining measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) related to destination awareness, visitation trends, partner engagement, and organizational effectiveness, leveraging existing tourism data sources and supplemental regional analytics.

## **F. Creative Economy and Regional Development Strategy**

- High-level strategies to advance creative economy development across Southwest Virginia
- Identification of priority initiatives, partnerships, and implementation pathways
- Alignment with existing regional plans, tourism strategies, and economic development efforts

## **G. Regional Backbone and Partner Support Model**

- Documentation and refinement of Friends' administrative, fiscal, and staffing support model for partner organizations such as RTM and CRVI
- Recommendations for formal agreements, cost recovery, governance alignment, and sustainability

## **H. Marketing and Communications Strategy**

- Integrated marketing and communications strategy for Friends, Visit SWVA, SWVA Cultural Center/Heartwood, and partner initiatives
- Recommendations for branding alignment, storytelling, audience segmentation, and performance metrics

## **I. Financial Sustainability and Business Model**

- Analysis of current revenue streams and cost structure
- Development of a business model and funding strategy that balances earned revenue, public funding, and private support
- Financial projections and scenario planning to support long-term sustainability

The consultant is expected to work closely with Friends staff and key stakeholders to ensure the final plan is practical, actionable, and directly usable for implementation. A final scope of work will be negotiated with the selected respondent and incorporated into the contract.

## **5. Deliverables**

The selected consultant shall produce the following implementation ready deliverables. All work is anchored by a comprehensive Business Plan and Strategic Framework, supported by targeted plans, tools, and documentation necessary for implementation and compliance.

### **A. Primary Deliverable**

#### **1. Comprehensive Business Plan & Strategic Framework**

A single, integrated, implementation-ready document that serves as the foundation for Friends of Southwest Virginia's organizational, operational, and strategic decision-making.

At a minimum, the Business Plan shall include:

- Executive Summary
- Organizational & Staffing Strategy
- Southwest Virginia Cultural Center (Heartwood) Operations & Business Model
- Retail, Gallery, Events & Rentals Strategy
- Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Growth Plan
- Creative Economy & Regional Development Strategy (high level)
- Regional Backbone & Partner Support Model
- Marketing & Communications Strategy (organizational focus)
- Financial Sustainability & Business Model
- Phased Implementation Roadmap, identifying short-term (0–12 months), mid-term (1–3 years), and long-term (3–5 years) actions, timelines, and responsible parties

## **B. Supporting Deliverables**

The following supporting deliverables shall provide the detailed analysis, tools, and frameworks necessary to implement and operationalize the Business Plan.

### **1. Staffing & Organizational Plan**

A detailed staffing plan aligned with Friends' regional role, including current state assessment, recommended organizational structure, phased staffing adjustments, job function summaries, succession considerations, and professional development recommendations.

### **2. SWVA Cultural Center (Heartwood) Operations & Risk Management Plan**

A stand-alone operational plan addressing daily operations, facilities and visitor services, emergency preparedness and risk mitigation, and space utilization and efficiency.

### **3. Events, Rentals & Facility Use Toolkit**

A practical operational toolkit, including event and rental policies, draft contract templates, fee and rate schedules, and a cost recovery model for staffing, equipment, and operations.

### **4. Retail & Artisan Gallery Business Strategy**

A focused business strategy for retail and artisan galleries at Heartwood, including performance analysis, merchandising and pricing recommendations, inventory and commission structures, revenue growth strategies, and artisan engagement considerations.

### **5. Destination Marketing Organization (Visit SWVA) Growth Strategy**

The Destination Marketing Organization Growth Strategy shall build upon Friends' existing designation as the region's recognized destination organization and focus on formalizing strategy, staffing alignment, funding sustainability, and performance measurement consistent with Destinations International best practices.

### **6. Creative Economy & Regional Development Action Plan (High Level)**

A concise, high-level framework that identifies priority creative economy focus areas, aligns with existing local, regional, and state plans, defines partnerships and implementation pathways, and clarifies Friends' role without duplicating other regional planning efforts.

### **7. Regional Backbone & Partner Support Framework**

A documented model for Friends' fiscal, administrative, and staffing support role, including defined service offerings, cost recovery and sustainability approaches, governance alignment recommendations, and a framework for formal agreements or MOUs.

### **8. Marketing & Communications Strategy (Friends of Southwest Virginia – Organizational Focus)**

An organizational marketing and communications strategy that articulates Friends' brand, voice, and value proposition; supports public relations and stakeholder communications; aligns internal messaging across Friends-managed initiatives; and establishes performance measures for organizational communications.

### **9. Financial Sustainability Model & Projections**

A financial model suitable for board and funder use, including revenue analysis, earned versus contributed revenue balance, scenario planning, and multi-year financial projections.

## **10. Stakeholder Engagement & Ongoing Communications Framework**

A structured framework for ongoing communication and engagement with boards, Planning District Commissions, county administrators, town managers, locality leadership, and state and federal agencies, including recommended communication approaches, roles, and tools.

## **11. Federal Compliance & Reporting Documentation**

Documentation sufficient to support federal monitoring, audit, and grant close-out requirements, including documentation of work performed, deliverables tied to scope and budget, and a final summary memorandum.

## **6. Proposal Requirements**

To be considered, all proposals must include the following elements in the following order.

### **A. Firm or Consultant Overview & Qualifications**

Background, relevant experience, and demonstrated capacity

### **B. Project Understanding & Technical Approach**

Description of methodology, work plan, and approach

### **C. Relevant Experience**

Examples of similar federally funded or regional projects

### **D. Project Team**

Names, roles, and qualifications of assigned personnel

### **E. Timeline**

Proposed schedule from contract execution through completion. Friends anticipates that the project will be completed within approximately 6 to 9 months from contract execution. Proposers should include a detailed proposed schedule consistent with this anticipated timeframe.

### **F. Cost Proposal**

Detailed, line-item budget organized by task or deliverable

### **G. References**

At least three professional references

## **7. Federal Funding Requirements**

This procurement and any resulting contract will comply with:

- 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance)
- Cost principles related to allowable, allocable, and reasonable costs
- Federal conflict of interest standards
- Debarment and suspension requirements (SAM.gov verification)
- Record retention and access to records requirements

All required federal contract provisions will be incorporated into the final agreement.

## 8. Budget Guidelines

Budgets must:

- Be detailed and organized by task or deliverable
- Reflect reasonable, allowable, and allocable costs
- Comply with 2 CFR Part 200 cost principles

The RFP does not include a predetermined budget in order to encourage competitive proposals and allow respondents to propose approaches and pricing that best align with the scope, expertise, and value offered.

Friends reserves the right to negotiate scope and budget with the selected respondent.

## 9. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee using the following weighted criteria:

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Points</b>
Project Understanding & Technical Approach	30
Firm / Consultant Experience & Qualifications	25
Relevant Federally Funded Experience	15
Timeline & Capacity	10
Cost Reasonableness & Clarity	10
References	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

## 10. Submission Instructions

Submit proposals electronically in PDF format to:

Kim Davis

Friends of Southwest Virginia

[kdavis@myswva.org](mailto:kdavis@myswva.org)

(no phone calls)

Proposal Deadline: **March 2, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. (noon)**

Late submissions will not be considered. (no exceptions)

## 11. QUESTIONS

All questions must be submitted in writing no later than **Friday, February 13**. Responses to all questions will be issued via written addendum and shared with all prospective respondents.

## 12. Conditions and Reservations

Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, waive minor irregularities, negotiate with one or more respondents, or cancel this RFP at any time. This RFP does not obligate Friends to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred in preparing 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 also provides administrative, fiscal, and staffing support for regional partner initiatives, including the Round the Mountain Artisan Network (RTM) and the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI). These initiatives are integrated into Friends' organizational structure and strategic direction, and their long-term sustainability, alignment, and impact are central considerations in this planning effort.

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