



# Request for Proposals

*Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson  
Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative*

**Issued by: Friends of Southwest Virginia**  
**RFP Release Date: Friday, March 27, 2026**  
**Deadline for Proposals: Monday, April 27, 2026**

# Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative

## Request for Proposals

### *Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Friends of Southwest Virginia (Friends), in partnership with the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission, Buchanan County, and Dickenson County, is soliciting proposals from qualified consultants to provide outdoor recreation planning and marketing services for the project known as:

*Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative.*

The project is funded through an Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development award with additional support from the Thompson Charitable Foundation.

Friends of Southwest Virginia will serve as the grantee and contracting entity.

#### 2. PROCUREMENT AUTHORITY

This procurement is funded in part by the Appalachian Regional Commission and is subject to the federal procurement standards of 2 CFR Part 200 and applicable Virginia law.

#### 3. PROJECT OVERVIEW

This initiative will deliver a coordinated set of tools to accelerate outdoor recreation development and investment across the Cumberland Plateau. The project will produce county-specific outdoor recreation development master plans for Buchanan County and Dickenson County, establish regional alignment around priority projects, and define clear implementation pathways supported by realistic funding strategies. The effort will also generate county-level marketing plans and unified regional brand and messaging alignment with Visit SWVA to ensure communities move forward with clarity and consistency. All work will build upon prior Appalachian Regional Commission investments and existing outdoor economy strategies already underway across Southwest Virginia.

#### 4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The *Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative* is a regional planning effort led by Friends of Southwest Virginia in partnership with the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission, Buchanan County, and Dickenson County.

The initiative expands Southwest Virginia's coordinated outdoor recreation strategy into the Cumberland Plateau by producing actionable, implementation-ready plans that strengthen connectivity between assets, support sustainable economic growth, and position the region as a competitive multi-day visitor destination.

This project is designed to move communities from ideas to execution by identifying priority investments, partnership structures, funding pathways, and market positioning necessary to advance outdoor recreation as a driver of long-term economic vitality.

The consultant team will work within an environment where significant regional groundwork has already been completed through prior Appalachian Regional Commission investments, statewide tourism strategies, and multi-jurisdictional outdoor economy initiatives. The expectation is alignment, not reinvention.

## 5. SCOPE OF SERVICES

### A. **Regional Initiative & Plan - *Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Development Initiative***

This initiative establishes the strategy that will guide how Buchanan and Dickenson Counties compete, collaborate, and grow within the Southwest Virginia and Central Appalachian outdoor marketplace.

The regional plan shall define how assets across county and state lines function as connected visitor experiences, establish priority corridors, gateways, and movement patterns, identify actions that increase length of stay and visitor spending, clarify leadership roles among regional and local partners, and position the Cumberland Plateau within state and interstate recreation systems.

The consultant will analyze and prioritize opportunities for trail and greenway expansion, mountain biking systems, ATV and off-highway vehicle connectivity, outdoor climbing areas, blueway and river access development, fishing and water-based recreation, physical and economic links between outdoor assets and downtowns, and event and program activation.

The expected outcome is a shift from isolated destinations to coordinated itineraries capable of supporting overnight visitation, stimulating private investment, and strengthening long-term workforce and business growth.

### B. **County Plan - *Dickenson County Outdoor Recreation Development Plan***

This document will serve as a county-specific implementation guide. It will include:

- Inventory and assessment of existing assets
- Identification of development gaps
- Site-specific project opportunities
- Connectivity to adjacent counties and Kentucky or West Virginia
- Cost ranges and potential funding sources
- Phased development strategy

While informed by the regional initiative, the final product must stand alone as a usable roadmap for county leadership, economic development officials, and funding agencies.

### C. **County Plan - *Buchanan County Southern Gap Outdoor Recreation Development Plan***

This targeted plan will concentrate on the Southern Gap area, including recreation and tourism assets associated with the expanded footprint of Breaks Interstate Park.

The consultant will evaluate:

- Current and planned developments
- Prior studies and interstate initiatives
- Opportunities for stronger cross-border coordination
- Visitor infrastructure needs
- Market differentiation for the gateway

The outcome should strengthen Southern Gap as a premier access point into the broader regional outdoor system.

## **D. Outdoor Recreation Marketing Plan**

Marketing development will occur concurrently with planning to ensure identified priority projects translate into promotable, investment-ready opportunities.

The marketing program must support both near-term awareness and long-term brand building. Key elements include:

- Creation of a project website or digital engagement platform for each county
- Tools for surveys and stakeholder participation
- Development of a project video for each county
- Messaging hierarchy for priority assets
- Visual direction that can inform signage and collateral
- Alignment with Friends of Southwest Virginia and Visit SWVA branding

At project completion, digital platforms will serve as permanent repositories for plans, maps, and implementation materials.

The consultant will also establish an overarching Cumberland Plateau outdoor recreation identity that communities can adopt as projects move from concept to construction.

## **6. DELIVERABLES**

The consultant shall produce professional, implementation-ready deliverables suitable for use in grant applications, capital requests, legislative engagement, and partner coordination. Draft and final formats must be approved by Friends of Southwest Virginia.

### **Planning Deliverables**

#### **Buchanan County Outdoor Recreation Development Master Plan**

- The consultant shall prepare a standalone, implementation-oriented master plan that provides Buchanan County with a clear roadmap for advancing outdoor recreation investment, with special emphasis on the Southern Gap area, including areas along the Coalfield Expressway corridor, and their relationship to Breaks Interstate Park.
- The plan must evaluate how countywide assets and the Southern Gap gateway function together to support regional competitiveness, cross-border visitation, and long-term economic growth.
- At a minimum, the master plan shall include an inventory and assessment of existing recreation assets, identification of gaps and development constraints, and recommended priority projects that strengthen connectivity within the county and to neighboring jurisdictions and states. The consultant shall establish a realistic phasing strategy, provide planning-level cost estimates, and outline potential funding and financing pathways that position projects for grant readiness.
- Recommendations must identify likely lead or supporting implementation partners, address operations and maintenance considerations, and evaluate visitor infrastructure needs necessary to support increased use.
- The consultant shall also review current and proposed developments, incorporate relevant prior studies and interstate initiatives, and recommend strategies to enhance cross-border coordination and market differentiation for the Southern Gap gateway.

- The expected outcome is a practical playbook that enables county leadership to pursue funding, recruit partners, and advance Southern Gap as a premier access point within the broader regional outdoor recreation system.

### **Dickenson County Outdoor Recreation Development Master Plan**

- The consultant shall prepare a standalone, implementation-oriented master plan that provides Dickenson County with a clear and actionable roadmap for advancing outdoor recreation development and investment.
- The plan must include a comprehensive inventory of existing countywide assets, identification of opportunity areas, and a prioritized set of recommended projects that strengthen connectivity within the county and to adjacent counties and interstate systems. The consultant shall define development priorities, provide planning-level cost ranges, outline realistic funding strategies, and identify responsible or supporting entities necessary to move projects forward.
- Recommendations must also establish logical implementation sequencing so county leadership and partners can advance projects efficiently and competitively.
- The final document shall be structured to support the immediate pursuit of grants, partnerships, and capital funding.

### **Regional Priority Project Matrix**

A consolidated reference tool that identifies and compares projects across both counties.

At minimum, it must include:

- Project name and description
- Location
- Purpose and benefit
- Estimated cost range
- Potential funding programs
- Readiness level
- Suggested project lead
- Recommended timeframe

This matrix should allow decision makers to quickly identify which projects are most competitive for investment.

### **Economic and Business Opportunity Analysis**

- The consultant shall prepare a standalone, implementation-oriented master plan that equips Dickenson County with a clear and practical roadmap for advancing outdoor recreation development and attracting investment.
- The plan shall present a comprehensive inventory of existing assets, identify key opportunity areas, and establish a prioritized portfolio of projects that enhance connectivity within the county and link to neighboring jurisdictions and interstate systems. The consultant shall define development priorities, provide planning-level cost ranges, recommend achievable funding strategies, and identify the partners best positioned to lead or support implementation.

- Recommendations must outline a logical sequence of action so county leadership can move projects forward efficiently, strengthen competitiveness, and build momentum.
- The final document must be organized to enable the immediate pursuit of grants, partnerships, and capital funding opportunities.

### **Mapping Package**

- Provide a clear visual depiction of the outdoor recreation system.
- Maps must show existing and proposed trails, river access points and blueways, key gateways, connections to downtown areas, and priority locations for future development.
- All mapping files and supporting data must be delivered in formats that Friends of Southwest Virginia and local partners can use for ongoing planning, funding applications, and marketing efforts.

### **Marketing Deliverables**

#### **Outdoor Recreation Attraction & Marketing Plan (One per County)**

- Each county will receive a practical marketing roadmap that outlines how its outdoor recreation assets should be presented to priority visitor audiences.
- The plan must identify market opportunities, define the county's competitive position, highlight priority experiences, and recommend promotional strategies and partnerships that expand reach and impact. It should also include a phased approach for activating marketing efforts as projects and infrastructure come online.

#### **Target Audience Profiles**

- Identify the visitor groups most likely to be attracted to new or improved outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Profiles should describe key characteristics such as age and household traits, motivations for travel, typical trip behaviors, spending patterns, and the types of media or information sources they use when planning visits.

#### **Messaging Framework**

- Provide a practical structure that counties and partners can use to communicate in a consistent and coordinated way.
- The framework should define primary value propositions, supporting themes, and sample narrative direction, along with adaptable language that can be used across websites, social media, partner promotions, and future marketing materials.

#### **Visual Direction**

- Provide simple guidance that creates a cohesive and recognizable look and feel across materials.
- This may include recommendations for color palette, typography, photography style, and approaches to maps and icons. The purpose is to promote clarity and consistency rather than undertake a full brand redesign.

### **Approved promotional materials**

- The consultant shall develop a limited set of promotional materials that translate planning outcomes into market-ready communication tools. Materials must align with Friends of Southwest Virginia brand standards and may not be released publicly without written approval. All working files and production-ready formats shall be transferred to Friends upon completion.

## **7. PROJECT COORDINATION**

Friends of Southwest Virginia will serve as final decision authority on scope, budget, and deliverable acceptance. The consultant will participate in meetings with the Project Management Team and Advisory Team throughout the process.

## **8. MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS**

### **Respondents must demonstrate:**

- Experience in outdoor recreation or tourism planning
- Successful completion of comparable projects
- Capacity to meet federal grant requirements
- Ability to perform within schedule and budget

Status as not debarred or suspended from federal contracting

## **9. IMPORTANT RFP DATES AND DEADLINES**

- March 27, 2026: RFP Release
- April 27, 2026: RFP deadline
- April 28 – May 27, 2026: RFP Proposal Review and Selection of Strategic Planning Consultant
- June 1, 2026: Final Selection of Strategic Planning Partner and Notice of Award (All bidding candidates, including the selected consultant will be notified.)

## **10. PROJECT TIMELINE**

- June 1, 2026 - Notice of Award and commencement of the project.
- June 2026 - October 2026 - Consultants to conduct site visits and research.
- November 15, 2026 - First Draft of Plans for review
- January 2027 - All final outdoor recreation development plans and marketing plan deliverables for this project must be successfully submitted and concluded.
- February 2027 - Final administrative close out will take place.

## **11. 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.

## 12. 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

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

## 13. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Interested consultants should submit their proposals by Friday, April 3, 2026 to:

Jen Otey

Friends of Southwest Virginia

1 Heartwood Circle

Abingdon, VA 24201

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

*Please, no phone calls*

Proposal Deadline: **April 27, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. (noon)**

Late submissions will not be considered. (no exceptions)

## 14. QUESTIONS

All questions must be submitted in writing no later than **Friday, April 17, 2026**. Responses to all questions will be issued via written addendum and shared with all prospective respondents.

## 15. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION - RFP RESPONSE LAYOUT

To ensure a fair and consistent evaluation process, respondents must organize their proposals according to the format outlined in this section. Proposals that do not follow the required structure may receive point deductions during scoring.

**Proposals shall not exceed 20 pages per project component.** Resumes, certifications, and other required attachments are not included in the page limit.

At a minimum, submissions should clearly address the consultant's approach to the regional Gateways to Adventure initiative, the methodology for completing the county-level planning work, and the development of both the regional and county outdoor recreation marketing strategies.

- **Title Page**  
The title page of the proposal must include your company's name, website address, corporate address, and telephone number. Also, include the principal contact's name and email address.
- **Executive Summary**  
Provide an executive summary of the approach your company plans to take to oversee the *Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan and Dickenson Outdoor Recreation Initiative*.
- **Company Information**
  - Description of your company and the core services you provide.
  - Organization capacity - Include staff size and company location(s).
  - Resumes of key team members who will work on this project.
  - Three professional references.

- **Qualifications and Relevant Experience**
  - Outline the qualifications, expertise, and experience of the project management team members who will be directly involved in this initiative.
  - Comparable Project Examples/Relevant Experience:
    - Include examples of similar projects executed, particularly in outdoor recreation planning and rural community development and regional marketing.
  - Provide an overview of the company's knowledge and/or experience with the Cumberland Plateau and Southwest Virginia outdoor recreation projects.
  - Describe your company's experience with working on Appalachian Regional Commission and Thompson Charitable Foundation funded projects.
  - Describe your company's experience working on large scale national and international outdoor recreation planning projects.
  - Company Recommendations and Accolades
    - Present notable recommendations, recognitions, or accolades relevant to outdoor planning or community development initiatives.
  
- **Project Methodology, Development, and Timeline**
  - Describe your overall approach to completing the work, including how planning, economic analysis, mapping, stakeholder engagement, and marketing activities will be conducted.
  - Explain your strategy for collaborating with Friends of Southwest Virginia, county leadership, and regional partners to move ideas toward implementation and investment readiness.
  - Outline your process for organizing and facilitating meetings, preparing agendas, documenting discussions, and producing required deliverables and reports.
  - Provide a detailed timeline that identifies major phases of work, key milestones, draft submissions, review periods, and final delivery.
  - Identify potential challenges or risks associated with the project and describe how those issues will be proactively managed.
  
- **Cost Proposal**

Provide labor categories, hourly rates, estimated hours, and reimbursable expenses, acknowledging that Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to negotiate final scope and pricing.
  
- **Required Attachments**

Proposals must include the following documentation:

  - **Proof of insurance**, including current certificates for general liability and any other coverage applicable to the services proposed.
  - **Debarment and suspension certification**, confirming the firm and its principals are eligible to participate in federally funded projects.
  - **Conflict of interest disclosure**, identifying any actual or potential conflicts involving Friends of Southwest Virginia, Buchanan County, Dickenson County, or Cumberland Plateau PDC.
  - **Completed W-9** form or documentation of business registration demonstrating the firm's legal authority to operate.

## 16. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION - EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Experience and expertise in strategic planning and economic impact assessments.
- Experience and expertise in place-based development projects.
- Experience and expertise in developing regional marketing plans.
- Demonstrated success in working with similar organizations and projects.
- Experience with working on Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funded projects.
- Expertise in outdoor recreation planning and rural community experience.
- Clarity and feasibility of proposed methodologies.
- Cost-effectiveness of the proposal.
- References and past performance.
- Familiarity with Southwest Virginia, Cumberland Plateau region, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Evaluations of each proposal are based on qualifications, approach, project familiarity, past work examples, proposed timeline, workload, project management qualifications, and development strategies.

## 17. 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>

*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.

## 18. PROCUREMENT SCHEDULE

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
RFP Release	March 27, 2026
Proposals Due	April 27, 2026
Review Period	April 28 – May 27, 2026
Notice of Award	June 1, 2026
Anticipated Start	June 8, 2026

*Friends may adjust the schedule at its discretion.*

**19. CONTRACT TYPE & PAYMENT**

The contract will be deliverable-based. Payments will be made on a reimbursement basis for completed and approved work. Advances require written authorization.

**20. INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS**

The selected consultant must carry appropriate professional liability and general liability insurance and provide certificates upon request.

**21. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Respondents must disclose any real or perceived conflicts involving Friends, counties, Cumberland Plateau PDC, or advisory members.

**22. FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS**

The resulting contract will incorporate all provisions required under applicable federal law and regulation, including but not limited to Equal Employment Opportunity requirements, Byrd Anti-Lobbying certification, Debarment and Suspension, Access to Records, Termination for Cause and Convenience, and applicable Administrative Remedies.

**23. RIGHTS OF FRIENDS OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, waive informalities or minor irregularities, request clarifications from respondents, cancel or reissue this Request for Proposals at any time, negotiate the final scope of work and pricing, and make an award in whole or in part, whichever is determined to be in the best interest of the organization and its funding partners.

**24. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

Proposals must be received no later than April 3, 2026, by the time specified in the official public advertisement. Submissions received after the stated deadline will be considered late and will not be reviewed or accepted.

Detailed instructions regarding the method of delivery, required format, and submission location will be provided in the official posting and advertisement for this Request for Proposals.

## **Appendix**

### **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/>

## **Appendix B**

Friends of Southwest Virginia fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. For more information, or to obtain a Title VI Discrimination Complaint Form, contact (276) 492-2400 ext.2422.