



Request for Proposals

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

Issued by: Friends of Southwest Virginia

RFP Release Date: Friday, August 14, 2026

Deadline for Proposals: Monday, September 14, 2026

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 marketing services for the project known as:

Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Marketing 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 support the development and delivery of a coordinated suite of destination marketing planning and marketing tools designed to accelerate outdoor recreation development, tourism, and investment across Virginia's Cumberland Plateau region.

Buchanan County and Dickenson County are currently developing county-specific Outdoor Recreation Development Master Plans. These plans will establish a shared vision for expanding outdoor recreation assets, identify priority projects, and outline actionable implementation strategies supported by realistic funding opportunities. Together, the plans will strengthen regional coordination while providing each county with a clear roadmap for future investment.

Building upon this planning effort, the *Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Marketing Initiative* will develop county-specific outdoor recreation marketing plans and establish a unified regional brand and messaging framework. This work will align with the regional destination marketing efforts of Visit Southwest Virginia (Visit SWVA), ensuring that both counties present a consistent and compelling identity while highlighting their unique assets and experiences.

The selected consultant will work collaboratively with project partners to create strategic marketing tools that increase visitation, attract investment, and support long-term economic growth through outdoor recreation. All work will build upon previous investments by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and complement existing outdoor economy initiatives already underway throughout Southwest Virginia. The resulting plans and branding assets will provide local governments, tourism organizations, and community partners with coordinated strategies to promote the region as a premier outdoor recreation destination.

4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Gateways to Adventure: Buchanan & Dickenson Counties Outdoor Recreation Marketing Initiative is a regional effort led by Friends of Southwest Virginia in partnership with the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission, Buchanan County, and Dickenson County. The initiative supports the continued development of Southwest Virginia's outdoor recreation economy by expanding coordinated destination marketing and branding efforts into the Cumberland Plateau region.

This project complements the current development of county-specific Outdoor Recreation Development Master Plans by translating planning priorities into cohesive marketing strategies that promote the region as a premier outdoor recreation destination. Through the creation of county-level marketing plans and a unified regional brand, the initiative will strengthen connections between outdoor recreation assets, gateway communities, cultural heritage experiences, and tourism partners while encouraging longer visitor stays and increased economic impact.

The project is intended to provide implementation-ready marketing and branding tools that local governments, tourism organizations, and community partners can use to attract visitors, support outdoor recreation businesses, and enhance regional competitiveness. Deliverables should identify target audiences, messaging, promotional opportunities, partnership strategies, and recommendations for long-term implementation that align with local priorities and regional tourism objectives.

Consultants should recognize that this initiative builds upon substantial planning and investment already underway throughout Southwest Virginia. Previous investments by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), regional destination development efforts, statewide tourism strategies, and multi-jurisdictional outdoor recreation initiatives have established a strong foundation for this work. Rather than creating a new vision, the selected consultant will be expected to align with existing plans, leverage prior research and stakeholder engagement, and produce marketing strategies that complement and advance established regional goals.

5. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The selected consultant will work directly and collaboratively with Buchanan County and Dickenson County to strengthen each county's tourism marketing capacity, develop county-specific outdoor recreation marketing strategies, and implement targeted marketing activities during the project period.

This work is intended to be both strategic and hands-on. In addition to developing long-term marketing plans, the consultant will serve as a tourism marketing advisor to each county, helping local staff evaluate current marketing efforts, identify opportunities for improvement, strengthen day-to-day tourism communications, and implement practical strategies that can continue beyond the contract period.

The consultant should recognize that Buchanan County and Dickenson County have different tourism assets, audiences, organizational capacities, and opportunities. While regional coordination is important, the consultant will be expected to work with each county individually to develop strategies that reflect its unique identity and priorities.

The work should complement the Outdoor Recreation Development Master Plans currently underway in Buchanan and Dickenson counties and align with the broader outdoor recreation and destination marketing efforts of Friends of Southwest Virginia and Visit Southwest Virginia (Visit SWVA).

At a minimum, the Scope of Work shall include the following:

a. County Tourism Marketing Assessment and Technical Assistance

Work individually with Buchanan County and Dickenson County tourism staff and leadership to assess existing tourism marketing efforts and identify opportunities to strengthen each county's overall marketing program.

The consultant should review and provide recommendations related to areas such as:

- Current tourism marketing strategy and annual marketing activities
- Websites and digital presence
- Social media platforms, content, frequency, and audience engagement
- Email marketing and newsletters
- Existing advertising and paid media
- Public relations and earned media opportunities
- Photography, video, and other content needs
- Visitor-facing information and promotional materials
- Event and attraction promotion
- Partnerships with tourism businesses, communities, attractions, and regional organizations
- Marketing budgets and allocation of available resources
- Staff capacity, processes, and tools needed to sustain marketing efforts

The consultant should provide ongoing technical assistance and coaching throughout the project rather than limiting recommendations to a final written report.

b. Two County-Specific Outdoor Recreation Marketing Plans

Develop a comprehensive outdoor recreation marketing plan for Buchanan County and a separate plan for Dickenson County. Each plan should establish a distinctive outdoor recreation position for the county while complementing the broader Southwest Virginia outdoor recreation and Visit SWVA brands.

Plans should include, at minimum:

- Identification of priority outdoor recreation assets and experiences
- Target audiences and visitor profiles
- Market positioning and key differentiators
- Brand and destination messaging
- Recommendations for storytelling and content development
- Digital and social media strategies
- Email and newsletter strategies
- Public relations opportunities
- Paid advertising recommendations
- Partnership and cross-promotion opportunities
- Strategies for connecting outdoor recreation with communities, lodging, dining, cultural heritage, downtowns, and other visitor experiences
- Recommendations for increasing length of stay and visitor spending
- Strategies for supporting outdoor recreation businesses and attracting future tourism investment
- A phased implementation plan identifying short-, mid-, and long-term actions

The plans should be practical and scaled appropriately to the staff capacity and financial resources available within each county.

c. Marketing Implementation and Advertising

The consultant will assist Buchanan County and Dickenson County with implementing priority marketing recommendations during the contract period.

A portion of the overall project budget should be reserved for paid advertising and media placement. The consultant will work with Friends of Southwest Virginia and each county to determine the most appropriate audiences, markets, platforms, timing, and advertising opportunities based on the strategies developed through this project.

Activities may include digital advertising, social media advertising, sponsored content, print or outdoor advertising, travel and tourism media, or other targeted opportunities demonstrated to effectively reach priority audiences.

The consultant should provide recommendations regarding media placement and oversee or coordinate approved advertising activities, including development of necessary creative assets when appropriate.

d. Content and Communications Strategy

Develop practical recommendations and tools that Buchanan County and Dickenson County can use to strengthen ongoing tourism communications.

This should include guidance related to:

- Social media content and content calendars
- Email newsletters and visitor communications
- Website content
- Storytelling and editorial content
- Photography and video usage
- Seasonal campaigns
- Promotion of outdoor recreation assets, events, businesses, and communities
- Cross-promotion with Visit SWVA and other regional and statewide tourism partners

Where appropriate, the consultant should work alongside county staff to demonstrate recommended approaches and help establish repeatable processes that can continue after the project concludes.

e. Digital Engagement Platforms

Develop or oversee the creation of a dedicated project website or digital platform for each county that can support both the planning process and long-term implementation.

Each platform should:

- Communicate project goals and progress
- Provide opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement during planning
- Showcase priority outdoor recreation assets and opportunities
- Provide a permanent repository for completed master plans, maps, implementation strategies, and related materials
- Be structured so that the county can maintain and expand the platform following completion of the project

f. Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Support engagement with tourism businesses, outdoor recreation organizations, attractions, local governments, community organizations, and other stakeholders to inform the marketing strategies.

Engagement tools may include:

- Stakeholder interviews or working sessions
- Online surveys
- Tourism industry meetings
- Community engagement opportunities
- Digital feedback tools

The consultant should coordinate engagement activities with the Outdoor Recreation Development Master Planning process whenever possible to avoid duplication and stakeholder fatigue.

g. Promotional Video and Content Development

Produce one promotional video for Buchanan County and one for Dickenson County highlighting each county's outdoor recreation assets, communities, visitor experiences, and unique destination identity. Videos should be designed for use across tourism websites, social media, digital advertising, presentations, and other promotional channels.

The consultant should also identify opportunities to capture photography, short-form video, and other content that can provide each county with a stronger library of marketing assets for future use.

h. County Branding and Creative Direction

Develop or refine an outdoor recreation marketing identity for each county that is authentic to the destination and complements the broader Southwest Virginia outdoor recreation and Visit SWVA brands.

The consultant should not create two interchangeable county brands. Each should reflect the specific places, experiences, communities, stories, and character that differentiate Buchanan County and Dickenson County.

Work should include:

- County-specific positioning and messaging
- Messaging hierarchy
- Creative and visual direction
- Recommendations for photography and storytelling
- Guidance for digital marketing, advertising, signage, wayfinding, and printed materials
- Recommendations for consistent application of the identity across tourism marketing channels

i. Cumberland Plateau Regional Marketing Framework

Develop an overarching framework for positioning Buchanan and Dickenson counties collectively within the Cumberland Plateau and the broader Southwest Virginia outdoor recreation destination. Rather than creating a separate regional brand that competes with existing destination brands, this framework should establish how the counties can market collaboratively, package complementary experiences, share stories and content, and connect their individual tourism efforts to Visit SWVA.

The framework should identify opportunities for joint campaigns, itineraries, cross-promotion, regional storytelling, and partnerships that encourage visitors to explore multiple communities and extend their stay within the region.

j. Implementation, Training, and Final Recommendations

At the conclusion of the project, provide each county with a clear, prioritized implementation roadmap identifying:

- Immediate actions
- One-year priorities
- Longer-term marketing opportunities
- Recommended marketing investments
- Potential partnership opportunities
- Staffing or capacity considerations
- Recommended tools and resources
- Metrics for measuring marketing performance and visitation growth

The consultant should provide training and knowledge transfer to county staff so that the strategies, tools, platforms, and marketing practices developed through this project can be sustained locally.

All deliverables should be implementation-ready and designed for long-term use by Buchanan County, Dickenson County, Friends of Southwest Virginia, and regional partners. The consultant is expected to build upon existing research, planning, branding, and stakeholder engagement rather than duplicating work already completed or underway.

6. DELIVERABLES

The selected consultant shall provide professional, implementation-ready deliverables for Buchanan County and Dickenson County. All deliverables shall be submitted in draft and final formats, as applicable, and incorporate feedback from Friends of Southwest Virginia and project partners.

At a minimum, deliverables shall include:

a. County Outdoor Recreation Marketing Plans

One comprehensive marketing plan for Buchanan County and one for Dickenson County, including:

- Tourism marketing assessment and recommendations
- Target audiences and market positioning
- County-specific messaging and creative direction
- Digital, social media, email, public relations, and advertising strategies
- Partnership and cross-promotion opportunities
- Phased implementation priorities and recommended marketing investments
- Performance measures and recommendations for long-term implementation

b. Target Audience and Messaging Framework

Target audience profiles and messaging recommendations for each county, including priority visitor segments, key messages, differentiators, and guidance for consistent use across marketing channels.

c. County Creative and Visual Direction

Creative direction for each county's outdoor recreation marketing, including recommendations for photography, imagery, typography, graphic treatments, and application across digital and printed

materials. All recommendations should complement existing Friends of Southwest Virginia and Visit Southwest Virginia branding.

d. Marketing and Promotional Assets

A limited suite of implementation-ready materials developed in collaboration with each county, which may include social media templates, digital graphics, website content, email/newsletter templates, advertising creative, print collateral, or other approved materials.

e. Paid Advertising Campaign

Development and implementation of an approved paid advertising campaign for each county, including media recommendations, placement, creative assets, and campaign performance reporting. The final advertising budget and media mix will be determined in coordination with Friends of Southwest Virginia and each county.

f. Digital Platforms

One project website or digital platform for each county to support public engagement and serve as a long-term repository for master plans, maps, implementation strategies, and related project materials.

g. Promotional Videos

One professionally produced promotional video for Buchanan County and one for Dickenson County, suitable for websites, social media, digital advertising, presentations, and tourism promotion.

h. Regional Marketing Framework

A concise framework outlining opportunities for Buchanan and Dickenson counties to collaborate on outdoor recreation marketing and connect their individual efforts with Visit Southwest Virginia.

i. Training and Implementation Support

Hands-on technical assistance and training for county tourism staff throughout the project, along with final recommendations and tools to support continued implementation after the contract period.

Final Files and Ownership

At project completion, the consultant shall provide all final reports, graphics, videos, creative assets, templates, and supporting materials in production-ready and editable formats. Materials developed specifically for this project shall become the property of Friends of Southwest Virginia unless otherwise agreed upon in writing.

7. PROJECT BUDGET:

The maximum budget available for this project is \$98,000. This amount shall include all labor, project management, stakeholder engagement, travel, meetings, research, website or digital engagement platform development, video production, graphic design, preparation of deliverables, and all other costs necessary to complete the Scope of Work.

The anticipated budget allocation by county is as follows:

- Dickenson County: \$49,000 for marketing planning and associated deliverables.
- Buchanan County: \$49,000 for marketing planning and associated deliverables.

Proposals shall include a detailed cost proposal that itemizes costs by major task, identifies any subcontractor expenses, and provides a total not-to-exceed project cost. Friends of Southwest Virginia

reserves the right to negotiate the final scope of work and budget with the selected consultant to ensure project objectives are achieved within available funding.

8. 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.

9. MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Respondents must demonstrate:

- Experience in outdoor recreation or tourism marketing
- 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

10. IMPORTANT RFP DATES AND DEADLINES

- August 14, 2026: RFP Release
- September 16, 2026: RFP deadline
- September 15 - October 15, 2026: RFP Proposal Review and Selection of Strategic Planning Consultant
- October 16, 2026 : Final Selection of marketing consultant and Notice of Award (All bidding candidates, including the selected consultant will be notified.)

11. PROJECT TIMELINE

- October 16, 2026 - Notice of Award and commencement of the project.
- October 19, 2026 - December 14, 2026 - Consultants to draft marketing plans.
- December 15- First Draft of Plans for review
- February 1, 2027 - All final marketing plan deliverables for this project must be successfully submitted and concluded.
- February 15, 2027 - Final administrative close out will take place.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Interested consultants should submit their proposals by Monday, September 16, 2026 to:

Jen Otey
Friends of Southwest Virginia
1 Heartwood Circle
Abingdon, VA 24201
jotey@myswva.org
Please, no phone calls

Proposal Deadline: September 16, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. (noon)

Late submissions will not be considered. (no exceptions)

15. QUESTIONS

All questions must be submitted in writing no later than Monday August 31, 2026. Responses to all questions will be issued via written addendum and shared with all prospective respondents.

16. 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 marketing initiative, the methodology for completing the 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 Marketing 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 and regional marketing.
 - Provide an overview of the company's knowledge and/or experience with the Cumberland Plateau and Southwest Virginia outdoor recreation assets and 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 regional outdoor recreation marketing projects.
 - Company Recommendations and Accolades - Present notable recommendations, recognitions, or accolades relevant to regional outdoor recreation marketing initiatives.
- **Project Methodology, Development, and Timeline**
 - Describe your overall approach to completing the work, including how marketing planning and 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.

17. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION - EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- 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 marketing 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.

18. EVALUATION CRITERIA

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

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

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.

19. PROCUREMENT SCHEDULE

Milestone	Date
RFP Release	August 14, 2026
Proposals Due	September 16, 2026
Review Period	September 15 – October 15
Notice of Award	October 16, 2026
Anticipated Start	October 19, 2026

Friends may adjust the schedule at its discretion.

20. 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.

21. INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

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

22. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Proposals must be received no later than September 14, 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 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.