



Request for Proposals

An Outdoor Recreation Regional Branding & Marketing Campaign for Western North Carolina

RFP release date: February 17, 2020

Responses due by: March 12, 2020

The Growing Outdoors Partnership is seeking proposals from qualified firms to create and deliver an outdoor recreation-based regional branding and marketing campaign for Western North Carolina (WNC).

Background

The Growing Outdoors Partnership is a multi-year initiative to connect and expand Western North Carolina's burgeoning outdoor equipment and recreation industry. The effort, which is supported by local partners and an Appalachian Regional Commission POWER grant, is advancing this growing sector in several ways from launching new tailored workforce training programs to financing innovative entrepreneurs to elevating outdoor investment opportunities within rural communities. The Growing Outdoors Partnership is managed by Mountain BizWorks, a North Carolina non-profit corporation that will serve as the contracting agent for this project. Additional background is available at outdoorswnc.com.

The Opportunity: Lifting up Western North Carolina as the East Coast Hub for Outdoor Industry

Western US cities, regions, and companies currently capture much of the imagery and attention of the outdoor industry. Major brands/companies such as Black Diamond, Columbia, Royal Robbins, North Face and others are built on this foundation as well as their founder-adventurer stories (based in their natural places). Appalachia has all the elements to be just as compelling,

but its stories remain largely untold. In fact, the region's brand still has several negative (and dated) connotations ranging from poverty to primitiveness.

The goal of this regional branding and marketing campaign will be to help change the prevailing narrative, authentically recognize Western North Carolina's world class outdoor recreation opportunities and brands, engender pride throughout the region, and to continue to position Western North Carolina as the eastern US hub for outdoor industry.

Work Done To-Date

The Growing Outdoors Partnership has convened a cross-sector Regional Marketing & Branding Working Group including representatives from regional outdoor gear manufacturers, marketing and tourism professionals, economic development, and outdoor media professionals. The Working Group met several times throughout 2019 to strategize how to approach this campaign, who the primary audiences will be, and to explore the region's unique outdoor assets. Two of the group's members also led a breakout session attended by around 65 regional stakeholders as part of the 2019 Outdoor Economy Conference. This session harvested additional ideas and data from across the region. Data from all of these activities is available upon request.

Desired Project Timeline

RFP & Contracting Timeline:

- RFP published on February 17
- Responses requested by Thursday March 12
- Interviews with potential firms during mid-to-late March
- Select and contract with firm in early April

Project Timeline:

- April: finalize campaign strategy and deliverables including a meeting with the Growing Outdoors Regional Marketing & Branding Working Group
- May – October: production
- October:
 - Launch/roll-out many of the key elements at the October Economy Conference on October 7, 2020
 - Host a half-day training for local and regional partners on how to use the branding and marketing assets adjacent to 2020 Outdoor Economy Conference – ideally on October 8th.
- Deliverables fully completed, accepted, and delivered by November 15, 2020

Audiences

The main audiences for this regional marketing campaign are outdoor industry influencers and decision makers.

This includes:

- key decision makers of established outdoor brands looking for locations outside of the typical western niche for marketing campaigns, gear testing, and expansion,
- national nonprofit organizations seeking to grow their audience and influence,
- industry media and influencers working to identify hidden opportunities that diversify their voice and share a unique perspective, and,
- entrepreneurial leaders searching for authentic communities to establish and grow their outdoor business.

While this is the main target, if done correctly, this campaign will also speak to a wider audience and will engender pride of place among our region's people, helping them recognize how special and valuable their outdoor places are.

Budget

The Growing Outdoors Partnership has a budget of \$75,000 for this initial phase of a regional marketing campaign. We are seeking a firm who can bring a focused and creative approach that delivers clear, measurable value for this first phase, sufficient to warrant additional marketing investment.

We're also very interested in ways to leverage these funds to amplify our potential impact. For example, part of the desired strategy is to create a library of assets that can be distributed and amplified through the channels of our many local partners. Another possible approach would be to use a portion of funds to incentivize major outdoor brands (North Face, Patagonia, etc.) to do photoshoots here featuring WNC places in their product marketing. This is just an example of the kinds of innovative leveraging strategies we're very open to seeing in the proposals.

Deliverables & Desired Campaign Elements

We've broken down this campaign into four main sets of deliverables. In your proposal, we request that you elaborate on how you would approach each of these, and how you recommend allocating the project budget across each of the parts.

Set I: Core Brand Assets: crafting a regional brand narrative, name, and visual system

- Regional brand name, logo, a brand script/narrative, and brand standards kit

- One main video to clearly connect (and introduce) our target audiences to the brand and unique message points. The main video will also have select cuts for social media in 15 and 30 second vertical and horizontal formats.
- Public-facing website

Set II: Library of shared-use marketing assets that convey the regional brand narrative and can be leveraged by local partners as well as used by the Growing Outdoors Partnership

- Design and produce an initial library of branding and marketing assets to be available for use by regional partners like outdoor industry (retailers, gear makers, outfitters, etc.) TDAs/CVBs, Chambers, Economic Development organizations, Visit NC, and others. Examples of potential library assets include:
 - Photos of active outdoor recreation that also highlight WNC world-class mountain landscapes and outdoor recreation infrastructure
 - Short video clips great for social media
 - Aspirational stories highlighting WNC outdoor recreation industry heroes (both gear and recreation)
 - All library assets (either captured or purchased) must have all rights conveyed in perpetuity for all partners of the Growing Outdoors Partnership for usage.

Set III: Activation & Distribution: create and implement a strategy to reach our key audiences. A few ideas that emerged from the Working Group are below. These should not be viewed as prescriptive, but rather just examples of potential activation strategies. We're particularly interested in understanding your expertise and recommended approach for the engagement and distribution phase of the campaign.

- A series of moving vignettes on everyday people in WNC and their love and use of place (ex. an advanced-manufacturing employee that kayaks on their lunch break). Stories that make the outdoors seem accessible to everyone, build regional pride, link the outdoors with the WNC lifestyle and quality of life
- Produce and document a road trip of WNC people travelling, camping, and experiencing special places here while using exceptional gear designed and made here. Would include a real time social media stories campaign and would highlight and demonstrate the regional brand's key message points.
- A system of marketing assets to better promote locally made gear in WNC outdoor retail and related locations (display signage, product hang tags or shelf talkers, entryway/door stickers, etc.)

Set IV: Measurement & Evaluation: clearly demonstrating the value and effectiveness of this regional marketing effort will be essential to its longevity and to garnering future investment. Please include details on how you might assess the campaign key metrics.

What to Include in Your Response

All responses to this RFP should include, at minimum, the following information:

- A description of your interest in this particular project
- The relevant qualifications of your firm, key project team members, and any collaborating partners. Please make sure to highlight any connections to, and experience working in the Western North Carolina region.
- If the RFP's timeline or key components should be adjusted in your firm's opinion based on your experience, please let us know what you might suggest and why.
- A description of how you will approach the project. Make sure to cover each of the four core campaign parts, known deliverables, and any initial conceptual directions or strategies you'd like to convey.
- The proposed project budget and how you envision this being allocated across the various project activities.
- A proposed timeline of key project activities and milestones.
- Relevant examples of prior work
- A primary contact

How to Submit a Response

An e-mail copy and one hard copy are requested to be delivered. They should be sent to the addresses below. Questions may also be addressed via email to this same address.

Please submit responses via email by no later than 11:59pm on Thursday March 12 to:

Noah Wilson
Program Director, Growing Outdoors Partnership

E-mail address: noah@mountainbizworks.org (Please use the subject line "Response to Growing Outdoors Marketing RFP")

Mailing address:
Attn: Noah Wilson
Mountain BizWorks
153 S Lexington Ave
Asheville NC 28801

Reserved Rights

The Growing Outdoors Partnership reserves, in its sole discretion, the following rights:

- (a) To exclusively determine whether any aspect of the proposal, or the proposal in its entirety satisfactorily meets the criteria established in this RFP;
- (b) To seek clarification from any respondent;
- (c) To solicit subsequent proposals from any respondent or respondents submitting a response;
- (d) To modify the scope of work to be considered for this project, and determine which respondents will be notified, in order to resubmit a revised proposal meeting the modified scope of work as determined by the Growing Outdoors Partnership; and
- (e) To reject any or all responses with or without cause.

In the event that this RFP is withdrawn by the Growing Outdoors Partnership, or the Growing Outdoors Partnership elects not to proceed for any reason, the Growing Outdoors Partnership shall incur no liability to any respondent for any costs for expenses incurred in connection with the preparation and submittal of the respondent's RFP response or any other submission prepared by respondent.

Thank you for your interest in this opportunity and we look forward to hearing from you!