



Request for Proposals

“Transitioning and Scaling Creative Sector Businesses”

A sector development plan for Creative Manufacturing in Western North Carolina

For

Land of Sky Regional Council of Government, High Country Council of Government, Southwest Council of Government, and regional consortium of partners

Submit Proposals to:

Land of Sky Regional Council

C/O Sara Nichols

339 New Leicester Hwy, Suite 140 Asheville, NC 28806

sara@landofsky.org

RFP Submittal Deadline: 5:00 pm (EST) January 28th, 2022

Mission- To cultivate and develop the creative sector manufacturing industry in Western North Carolina

Overview:

Land of Sky Regional Council was awarded funding to support the development of a regional plan to support and scale creative sector manufacturing businesses in Western North Carolina. This project seeks to target increased coordination between economic development specialists to arts sector organizations, identify gaps to support scaling manufacturing creative sector businesses, support workforce needs in the region, and develop best practices to transform microentrepreneurs into employers.

Developing emerging opportunities is a goal of all three Local Development Districts (LDDs) in Western North Carolina and this sector is growing almost 5% faster in the WNC region than other parts of the country. Due to the nature of this growth, the creative sector has caught the attention of economic development organizations across the region and the need for sector development is apparent. Some have worked to help support the needs of this community while others are curious about what those next steps should be. With the sector's potential capacity for rural growth our partners are interested in seeing what their area can do to leverage the creative sector.

Each of the LDDs have regional or economic development plans that call for a talented workforce and a healthy community. This project will dovetail with the existing strategies of each LDD, as well as benefit regional workers, businesses, and regional organizations working to move the needle on scaling creative sector businesses.

Counties included in this project are: Madison, Henderson, Buncombe, Yancey, Transylvania, Haywood, Graham, Swain, Cherokee, Clay, Mitchell, Macon, and Jackson.

Land of Sky Regional Council, in partnership with the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments, High Country Council of Governments, and other regional partners, is initiating this Request for Proposals(RFP) process for a professional consultant (the "Consultant") qualified to plan, execute, and deliver a report to identify points of collaboration of shared regional priorities from a business perspective.

The desired consultant must have experience and expertise with economic development strategic planning best practices and/or creative sector businesses. The consultant should have a strong and demonstrable background in developing targeted clusters in rural and urban areas.

PROJECT CONTEXT

LAND OF SKY REGION'S BACKGROUND

Land of Sky Regional Council is a State of North Carolina regional organization representing a four county area that includes Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties. For the purposes of this project, the region also includes Haywood, Swain, Graham, Cherokee, Clay, Jackson, Macon, Yancey, and Mitchell counties.

Land of Sky Regional Council is one of 16 regional councils in the State of North Carolina and works with local governments, state, and federal agencies to meet the region's needs on a wide range of governance issues, including, local and regional land use, environmental and transportation planning, administration, aging and workforce development services, and economic program development.

This project strategically partners with:

High Country Council of Governments, Southwestern Commission Council of Governments, Asheville Area Arts Council, Western Arts Agencies of North Carolina, Mountain BizWorks, Blue Ridge Natural Heritage Area, and others.

The Project-

The Western North Carolina region was declared a National Heritage Area by Congress in 2003, Western North Carolina is known for its entrepreneurial strength in the creative arts. Currently, the region hosts over 18,000 creative sector jobs. Unrealized potential exists in the local arts industry with a multitude of scalable businesses that need support to grow. This proposal is seeking a consultant to support the development of a regional plan to develop and scale the regional manufacturing industry.

The number of jobs in the creative sector has grown 3.4% in the past year and the arts industry is critical to the region's overall tourism ecosystem. However, entrepreneurs in the arts industry don't always benefit. Despite the \$319M in annual earnings, individually these small business owners earn 15% less than the regional average. Due to this dichotomy, many of these small business owners are forced to survive on government subsidies or seek other forms of employment.

Many of these microbusinesses create scalable products that could provide culturally authentic employment for a local workforce trained by high-quality regional educational programs and drawn to the area's quality of life. This initiative aims to unlock the potential of the arts economy by increasing the average wage for artists, reducing unemployment and further establishing the region's reputation as an entrepreneurial hub for artists.

We are seeking a strategic assessment of the creative manufacturing industry, and emerging opportunities for industry workforce alignment in the region.

Scope of Work Overview:

The “consultant” will be tasked on data gathering, community outreach, graphic design, mapping, and regional engagement for a scaling creative manufacturing business development plan for Western North Carolina.

The work will focus on addressing:

- Identify wrap-around support needs for creative sector businesses
- Interviewing mid-sized creative sector manufacturing companies across the country for desired location information
- Identify and map spaces in the region for creative industry cluster locations
- Research incubator/spec buildings and other needs for scalable creative sector businesses
- Highlight and research development advantages from companies that have been able to scale in this industry
- Develop strategies around markets and supply chain potential for the region to aid creative sector businesses to participate in a global marketplace
- Lay groundwork for conversations around joint marketing strategies to get connected in the marketplace
- Host regional conversations with creative entrepreneurs and other arts agencies about needs/desires to grow the sector into a competitive marketplace
- Identify creative entrepreneurs in the region poised for growth and connect them with available services
- Think past county lines for creative sector regional economy
- Identify and lay the groundwork for the need for a consortium to help drive implementation strategies
- Quantify potential workforce numbers in the creative sector
- Connect the linkage and commonalities between manufacturing and art to help rebrand the concept of manufacturing
- Recognize historical, cultural, and economic significance in the area of our creative sector
- Partner with business support services to customize educational needs for creative sector businesses

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Consultants responding to this RFP will be evaluated on the following basis:

- 30% Technical skills and staff/team expertise.
- 30% Proposed approach and plan of work, understanding of the issues and requested elements of project scope, including desired outcomes.
- 30% Past record of performance, experience, and actual prior Strategic Economic Plan experience and Communications and Marketing consulting.
- 10% Proposed Budget.

Land of Sky Regional Council reserves the right to reject any and all proposals received as a result of this solicitation, to negotiate with any qualified source, to waive any formality and any technicalities, or to cancel in part or in its entirety this RFP if it is in the best interests of the Council. This solicitation in no way obligates the Council to award a contract. If deemed necessary, a shortlist of qualified consultants may be selected from those who submitted proposals for follow-up interviews.

The Council reserves the right to seek clarification of any proposal submitted. Based on the review of the Statement of Qualifications, and the interview if applicable, the RFP Committee will make a recommendation to the Council on a preferred consultant.

RFP SCHEDULE

This timetable is for the respondent's information.
Project constraints may cause these dates to change.

RFP Available	January 4th, 2022
Proposal Questions/ Inquiries due	January 24th, 2022
Proposals due	January 28th, 2022
Consultant Selected	February 4th, 2022
Contract Commencement	October 15th, 2022

BUDGET

Grant funding for this project are approximately \$50,000. Please provide budgetary documentation with the proposal.

This project is generously funded through Appalachian Regional Commission and Dogwood Health Trust.

CONTACT

Questions or requests for additional information regarding this RFP should be directed to: Sara Nichols, Regional and Environmental Planner, Land of Sky Regional Council
sara@landofsky.org

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Freedom of Information Respondents are advised that any and all materials submitted in response to this RFP shall become the sole property of Land of Sky Regional Council and shall be subject to the provisions of North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 132 (Freedom of Information).

Incurred Costs This request for qualifications does not commit Land of Sky Regional Council to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request. Land of Sky Regional Council will not be liable in any way for any costs incurred by respondents in replying to this RFP.

Right to Cancel Land of Sky Regional Council reserves the right to cancel this RFP at any time and to decide not to consider any or all of the respondents submitting information in response to this request.

Severability If any terms or provisions of this Request for Qualification shall be found to be illegal or unenforceable, then such term or provision shall be deemed stricken and the remaining portions of this document shall remain in full force and effect.

Collusion By responding, the firm implicitly states that his/her proposal has not been made in connection with any other competing firm submitting a separate response to this RFP; is in all respects fair; and has been submitted without collusion or fraud.

Oral Presentation/Interview Respondents who submit a proposal in response to this RFP may be required to give an oral presentation of their proposal to Land of Sky Regional Council. This provides an opportunity for the respondent to clarify or elaborate on the proposal. These are fact-finding and explanation sessions only and do not include negotiation. Land of Sky Regional Council will schedule the time and location of these presentations. Oral presentations are an option of Land of Sky Regional Council and may or may not be conducted.

Affirmative Action Land of Sky Regional Council is an equal opportunity employer and requires an affirmative action policy from all contractors and vendors as a condition of doing business, as per Federal Order 11246. By signing the Response Page for this RFP, all respondents agree to this condition of doing business.

Assigning/Transferring of Agreement Any successful firm is prohibited from assigning, transferring, conveying, subletting, or otherwise disposing of the resulting agreement or its rights, title, or interest therein or its power to execute such an agreement to any other person, company or corporation without prior consent and approval in writing from Land of Sky Regional Council. Debarment and Suspensions (Executive Orders 12549 and 12689) A contract award (see 2 CFR 180.220) must not be made to parties listed on the governmentwide exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR part 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR part 1989 Comp., p. 235)