



Request: The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is requesting a **\$1,500,000** appropriation to implement the strategies identified in the 2024 Blue Ridge Rising Strategic Plan. This plan, developed and prioritized by local community leaders, will restore and expand the economic vitality and quality of life for the 1,030,846 citizens in this region. This funding will help ensure, that as physical recovery from Helene continues, the gateway communities will be prepared to accommodate visitors when they come. These funds will be used to meet the \$4.3 million match required for a \$5.13 million grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Background: The Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit of the National Park System with 16.7 million visitors in 2023 - more than Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite combined.

The Blue Ridge Parkway travels through Swain, Jackson, Transylvania, Haywood, Henderson, Buncombe, McDowell, Yancey, Mitchell, Burke, Avery, Caldwell, Watauga, Ashe, Wilkes, Alleghany, and Surry counties. Cumulatively along the 469-mile long Parkway, visitors directly spend \$1.4 billion and support more than 19,000 jobs, creating a total economic impact of \$1.8 billion every year.

Blue Ridge Rising Deliverables: Blue Ridge Rising supports Governor Cooper's response and recovery goals for western North Carolina for tourism, conservation, and outdoor recreation.

Implementation of the Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan includes strategies to:

- Expand Marketing
- Unify the Region's Voice
- Increase Protection of Views and Wildlife
- Expand Education and Workforce Development
- Build Organizational and Community Capacity
- Enhance the Visitor's Experience, including trails, campgrounds, and picnic areas.

Local Partnerships: Blue Ridge Rising partners are working collaboratively to engage partners along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

- Local communities along the Parkway corridor are considering resolutions supporting Blue Ridge Rising and the recovery efforts to restore and reopen the Parkway as soon as it can be done safely.

Contact: Carolyn Widner Ward, cward@brpfoundation.org, 828-776-4547

Blue Ridge Rising: 2025-2027 Budget and Implementation Highlights

Three-Year Budget and Funding Sources

- **\$12 million total budget for three years to benefit 29 counties in VA and NC**
- **\$7.3 million cash and in-kind already secured/committed**
 - Appalachian Regional Commission ARISE grant, \$5.13 million
 - Dogwood Health Trust, \$750,000
 - Explore Asheville, \$750,000
 - Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation (in-kind project support), \$300,000
 - National Park Foundation, \$170,000
 - Soloviev Foundation, \$150,000
 - Friends of Southwest Virginia (in-kind project support), \$89,550
 - Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, \$50,000
 - Duke Energy Foundation, \$25,000
 - National Park Trust, \$12,500.
- **\$4.7 million still needed for full program implementation, 2025-2027**

Substantial Community Engagement and Benefit

- **Community leader “ambassadors”** from every county will advise and assist the overall Blue Ridge Rising project.
- **Action teams that include local stakeholders and advisors** will finetune each strategy, guide pilot projects, and then scale-up for regional impact.
- **Annual two-state summits** will highlight success stories and lessons learned and strengthen regional networks.
- **\$3.7 million** will directly **advance regional strategies** to boost economic development.
- **\$3.6 million** in sub-grants will support **projects in local communities**.
- Several staff positions will be dedicated to **community outreach and engagement**.
- **Specialized staff will work with specific sectors** (e.g., tourism/marketing, workforce development) to implement coordinated solutions.
- **Innovative strategies** (e.g., Parkway corridor EV charging network, accessibility improvements, dark sky viewsheds) will **diversify and grow regional visitation**.
- **Positive impacts** on dozens of communities, hundreds of businesses, hundreds of students and job seekers, hundreds of thousands of local residents, and millions of annual visitors from throughout North Carolina, the United States, and the world
- A **unified regional network** to tackle new challenges and opportunities for growth in the years to come.

For more information: brpfoundation.org, blueridgerising.com