

Heart of Appalachia

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

April 14th, 2025

9:00 AM | Oxbow Center Conference Room & Virtual | St. Paul, Virginia

Attendance: Jeff Hess, Rita Surratt (Chair), Matthew Fields (Vice Chair) - Virtual, Beth Walker (Treasurer), Shiloh Brooks (Secretary), Tim Shortt

Ms. Surratt called the executive meeting to order at 9:05 AM

To discuss and interview three different possible social media management companies, to work with Heart of Appalachia regarding managing the social media content, developing a content calendar, and to be shared with the executive director, etc.

Mr. Hess shared that each of the companies was given a price point to stay within and considering the services that they could offer within the price range of \$20,000 - \$50,000.

Ripl Creative (Johnson City, TN)

Johnathan Fields with Ripl Creative out of Johnson City, TN was the first company to be interviewed. Ripl Creative came recommended by Virginia Tourism Corporation and they have worked with multiple large community and cities.

+ Content Creation and Calendar Development was offered in this pitch, which would also include ad development and geographic/demographic targeting within HOA's key targets.

+ Ad development and push range between \$2,500 - \$5,000, and they would only be running ads between April – September. With the ads, \$2,500 would guarantee at least 250,000 impressions, and ads with a budget of \$5,000 would guarantee at least 500,000 impressions.

+ Ripl Creative is also willing to offer free SEO Evaluations of the Heart of Appalachia Website and performance optimization.

+ Contract is based on a month-to-month basis, able to cancel anytime.

+ Annual Cost = \$32,000 (+ cost to run advertisements)

Corporate Marketing (Bristol, TN)

Rain Smith with Corporate Marketing out of Bristol, TN, was the second company to be interviewed. Corporate Marketing came recommended by Scott County and other regional partners in Southwest Virginia. They have a different approach to marketing through content creation, which includes putting focus on reels to share social media content.

+ 4 reels per month, with 3 reels highlighting HOA communities and 1 Appalachian Backroads reel with strategic rotation between HOA localities/content categories. Ensuring equal representation throughout the region.

+ Reel development will be utilized from the HOA's raw footage library, as well as optimizing AI to develop reels through high-definition photography.

+ Content Calendar development to be shared with the HOA Executive Director six weeks before ensure approval before post scheduling begins

+ Corporate Marketing will be dependent upon HOA and DMOs to share information and content with them. They are only committed to posting 4 organic reels a month (no advertisements that would be dependent upon the HOA, as well as content posting the rest of the week)

+ Monthly Cost = \$2,320 (professional services) + \$318 (hard cost services) – **TOTAL = \$2,638**

- With a total of 48 reels per year with the **ANNUAL COST = \$31,200**

Focus Communication (Oakwood, VA)

Cathy St. Clair, the owner and operator of Focus Communications Consulting, LLC, was the last company to be interviewed. Focus Communications came recommended by partners in the region, including Southern Gap Outdoors and VCEDA. Cathy is from the HOA of the region and, having worked with multiple other organizations within the HOA footprint, she is well-versed in the ongoing work in communities.

+ A minimum of seven posts weekly will be shared on the main HOA page and will rotate as to topics among tourism assets within the HOA region or other posts as directly related to HOA.

+ Additional postings specific to the Appalachian Backroads page will be developed twice weekly, or more often as content is available.

+ Growing followers and engagement for pages will be a priority. Development of targeted Facebook advertising, if desired, is included in the social media management price; however, an advertising budget will need to be set if HOA chooses to do targeted ads for the two pages, and those advertising expenses would be paid directly to Meta by HOA.

+ Proposed cost per month = \$1,500

+ **TOTAL ANNUAL = \$18,000**

Committee Discussion

After the conclusion of the interviews, the executive committee discussed together the qualities that each of the companies brought before the committee under the premise that Mr. Hess had shared with the companies beforehand. It was stated that;

+ Corporate Marketing offered a unique package, giving the organization access to developed social media reels/shorts to be posted on both Facebook and Instagram. Although it was mentioned that they are unable to offer more media content development and management than 4 reels a month (1 post per week).

+ There was a consensus among the committee members that the package offered by Focus Communication was more economical and offered more posting and content development.

Matthew Fields brought to the attention of the committee that it would be possible effective to reduce the radio advertisements by 50% (from \$30,000 to \$15,000) and redirect that funding the collection of photography and reel creation.

Shiloh Brooks made the suggestion that the organization reduce radio advertising by 50% and redirect the funding to the collection of content (i.e., professional photography & videography) to be used in the social media content. With also reaching out to Corporate Marketing to ask about just the creation of reels with the raw footage that is collected.

The committee agreed that it would be beneficial to see what the cost of both of these options are taken into account, and the committee requested Mr. Hess reach out to photographers and Corporate Marketing.

Mrs. Brooks made the motion that Heart of Appalachia move forward with Focus Communications to be the organization's social media content manager.

Second: Rita Surratt.

Vote: All - Aye

Adjourn

Ms. Surratt called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: Shiloh Brooks

Second: Beth Walker

Vote: All – Aye