

FRIENDS, Inc. Strategic Plan Presentation

& Implementation Workshop

January 28, 2025

Introduction

**Atlas Community Studios is a small,
woman and minority-owned firm
fueled by creative problem-solvers and
capacity-builders committed to
advancing the economic prosperity of
communities across the country.**

Overview

- FRIENDS, Inc. was awarded a Community Economic Development (CED) Planning Grant by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families in the Fall of 2023.
- FRIENDS has partnered with Atlas Community Studios to develop a Strategic Economic Development Plan and Implementation Strategy.

Key Objectives

- Evaluate the local labor market and create strategies to strengthen the workforce.
- Assess public infrastructure to ensure the city can offer its residents essential services.
- Understand and meet the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs so that they can thrive locally.
- Leverage existing assets to improve quality of place for residents and expand tourism opportunities.
- Develop partnerships with public, private, philanthropic, and community organizations to advance economic development.

The Strategic Plan

- During the development of this plan, Atlas focused on four key areas:
 - Small Business & Entrepreneurship
 - Labor Market & Workforce Development
 - Quality of Life
 - Infrastructure
- Working with the FRIENDS board, we identified three priority projects within each focus area.
 - Those projects serve as the foundation for this presentation.

Our agenda this morning...

- Briefly review each section of the strategic plan individually
 - review the goals and next steps for each project in the focus area
 - review funding opportunities and next steps for one of the projects in the focus area
- Discuss specific implementation tasks and assignments for one of the projects in the focus area

Small Business & Entrepreneurship

Priority Project 1

Establish a **low-interest revolving loan fund** specifically designed to help local small businesses gain a competitive edge.

Goals

- Provide financial resources to small businesses and entrepreneurs that may not qualify for traditional loans.
- Direct resources to areas or industries that may be overlooked by traditional financial institutions.

Priority Project 1

Establish a **low-interest revolving loan fund** specifically designed to help local small businesses gain a competitive edge.

Next Steps

- Establish Governance and Oversight
- Secure Initial Funding
- Develop Loan Program Details
- Market and Launch the RLF
- Ongoing Sustainability

Priority Project 2

Develop a program that offers **tax incentives** or matching grants to property owners who undertake the **renovation of vacant or dilapidated commercial properties.**

Goals

- Stimulate economic growth through investment in vacant or dilapidated properties.
- Reduce blight and revitalize neighborhoods.
- Increase property tax revenue by increasing property values and expanding the tax base.

Priority Project 2

Develop a program that offers **tax incentives** or matching grants to property owners who undertake the **renovation of vacant or dilapidated commercial properties.**

Next Steps

- Assess Community Needs
- Secure Funding
- Create the Program
- Launch, Market, and Promote the Program
- Celebrate Successes
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Priority Project 3

Establish a **Small Business Incubator** in Sevier County.

Partner with local business leaders and CCCUA to **develop in-house programming.**

Goals

- Strengthen and diversify small businesses by providing resources needed for success.
- Foster the development of startup businesses by providing entrepreneurs with the resources, they need to succeed.
- Leverage state and federal resources to support business incubation and small business development.

Priority Project 3

Establish a **Small Business Incubator** in Sevier County.

Partner with local business leaders and CCCUA to **develop in-house programming.**

Next Steps

- Conduct a Feasibility Study
- Develop Partnerships and Programming
- Secure a Suitable Location
- Secure Funding
- Market and Promote
- Track Progress

Funding

Priority Project 3

Establish a Small Business Incubator in Sevier County.

Partner with local business leaders and CCCUA to develop in-house programming.

Source	Deadline	Max Award	Cost Share
EDA Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs	Rolling	\$2.5M	50% max
USDA Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)	Feb. 28, 2025	No Max Typical Award ~\$10K-100K	None req.

Funding

Priority Project 3

Establish a Small Business Incubator in Sevier County.

Partner with local business leaders and CCCUA to develop in-house programming.

Next Steps

- #1: USDA Rural Business Development Grant
 - Business incubator feasibility study
 - Deadline: February 2025 (2026)
- #2: EDA Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs
 - Business incubator construction
 - Deadline: rolling



Time to get to work!

Implementation

Priority Project 1

Establish a low-interest revolving loan fund specifically designed to help local small businesses gain a competitive edge.

- Assemble a diverse board of directors to oversee the revolving loan fund.
 - Who? When?
- Develop clear policies for loan approvals, repayment terms, and fund management.
 - Who? When?
- Choose an administrator to manage day-to-day operations.
 - Who?
- Identify potential funding sources.
 - Who? When?

Labor Market & Workforce Development

Priority Project 1

Develop a **career pipeline program** that integrates high school education with CTE courses at CCCUA.

Partner with local businesses to offer apprenticeships or internships.

Goals

- Increase public awareness about the existing career pipelines that link area high schools, CTE courses, CCCUA, and local businesses.

Priority Project 1

Develop a **career pipeline program** that integrates high school education with CTE courses at CCCUA.

Partner with local businesses to offer apprenticeships or internships.

Next Steps

- Form a joint advisory group to develop a clear and engaging communication campaign targeting parents and students.
- Increase High School Counselor Engagement
- Develop a Parent and Student Education Program
- Identify funding sources to cover programming costs.

Priority Project 2

Develop a community recreation facility featuring sports courts, fitness areas, outdoor spaces, and youth programs to enhance workforce recruitment and retention.

Goals

- Conduct a feasibility study to ensure a recreation facility is viable and aligned with community needs and priorities.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for the recreation facility.
- Secure funding and begin building the facility while keeping the community updated on progress.

Priority Project 2

Develop a community recreation facility featuring sports courts, fitness areas, outdoor spaces, and youth programs to enhance workforce recruitment and retention.

Next Steps

- Conduct a Feasibility Study
- Gather Community Input
- Develop a Comprehensive Plan
- Secure Funding
- Finalize Construction Documents
- Begin Construction
- Keep the Community Informed

Priority Project 3

Establish
**connections with
key players in the
lithium
production**
industry and
investigate areas
where Sevier
County can plug
into the lithium
production supply
chain.

Goals

- Build connections with the lithium production industry to bring new opportunities to Sevier County.
- Partner with CCCUA and industry leaders to create programs that prepare Sevier County workers for jobs related to lithium production.
- Strengthen Sevier County's economy by growing industries that support the lithium production supply chain.

Priority Project 3

Establish
**connections with
key players in the
lithium
production**
industry and
investigate areas
where Sevier
County can plug
into the lithium
production supply
chain.

Next Steps

- Research
- Target Specific Supply Chain Niches
- Assess Local Assets and Gaps
- Craft a Specific Value Proposition
- Conduct Outreach to Establish Partnerships
- Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Funding

Priority Project 2

Develop a community recreation facility featuring sports courts, fitness areas, outdoor spaces, and youth programs to enhance workforce recruitment and retention.

Source	Deadline	Max Award	Cost Share
Facilities for Underdeveloped Neighborhoods (FUN) Park Grant	August 2025	\$100K	None
USDA Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)	Feb. 28, 2025	No Max Typical Award ~\$10K-100K	None req.
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	October 2025	\$100K	50%
USDA Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grant	July 2025	\$150K	None
ARDOT Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	June 2025	Varies	20%

Funding

Priority Project 2

Develop a community recreation facility featuring sports courts, fitness areas, outdoor spaces, and youth programs to enhance workforce recruitment and retention.

Next Steps

- # 1: USDA RBDG to fund Community Recreational Facility Feasibility Study
 - Deadline: February 2025 (2026)
 - Match: None required

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a black suit jacket over a white shirt, is relaxing in a swimming pool. He is sitting on a bright green inflatable ring. In his right hand, he holds a glass of red liquid with a lemon slice and two black straws. In his left hand, he holds a silver laptop. The water is clear blue with ripples. An orange banner with white text is at the bottom.

Time to get to work!

Implementation

Priority Project 3

Establish connections with key players in the lithium production industry and investigate areas where Sevier County can plug into the lithium production supply chain.

- Identify major players in lithium production and related industries.
 - Who? When?
- Research current trends and needs in the lithium supply chain.
 - Who? When?
- Identify locations and assets that might support lithium-related industries.
 - Who? When?

Quality of Life

Priority Project 1

Develop a marketing campaign that highlights Sevier County's outdoor attractions and promotes tourism-related activities.

Goals

- Promote Sevier County's outdoor and recreational attractions to attract more visitors and increase interest in the area.
- Develop a centralized platform for visitors to access information about attractions, activities, and events.
- Establish Sevier County as a destination for outdoor recreation through marketing initiatives.

Priority Project 1

Develop a marketing campaign that highlights Sevier County's outdoor attractions and promotes tourism-related activities.

Next Steps

- Establish Objectives, Metrics and a Budget
- Assess Existing Assets
- Develop the Scope of the Marketing Campaign
- Create Marketing Materials
- Establish Partnerships
- Review and Launch the Marketing Campaign
- Monitor, Evaluate, and Update

Priority Project 2

Support the **development and expansion of small businesses that cater to outdoor recreation** and amenities, while also improving access to and enhancing existing outdoor recreation facilities.

Goals

- Promote job creation through the growth of small businesses in the outdoor recreation sector.
- Position the region as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts.
- Support local entrepreneurs in creating and expanding businesses that leverage community assets and outdoor opportunities.
- Highlight Sevier County's natural assets and improve access to outdoor attractions.

Priority Project 2

Support the **development and expansion of small businesses that cater to outdoor recreation** and amenities, while also improving access to and enhancing existing outdoor recreation facilities.

Next Steps

- Conduct an Asset Inventory and Identify Gaps
- Improve Infrastructure and Access
- Provide Financial Support and Incentives for Small Businesses
- Offer Business Support and Training
- Promote Tourism and Marketing

Priority Project 3

Become a
**Welcoming
Community** to
better support
the resettlement
of immigrant
populations in
Sevier County.

Goals

- Develop a strategic plan to make Sevier County a more welcoming community for immigrant populations.
- Set clear benchmarks and criteria for local government and community organizations to support immigrant resettlement.
- Implement policies and effectively communicate the benefits of fostering a welcoming environment.

Priority Project 3

Become a
**Welcoming
Community** to
better support
the resettlement
of immigrant
populations in
Sevier County.

Next Steps

- Apply for the Gateways for Growth Program in early 2025
 - CHECK!
- Participate in Peer Learning Opportunities

Funding

Priority Project 2

Support the development and expansion of small businesses that cater to outdoor recreation and amenities, while also improving access to and enhancing existing outdoor recreation facilities.

Source	Deadline	Max Award	Cost Share
USDA Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)	Feb. 28, 2025	No Max Typical Award ~\$10K-100K	None req.
USDA Rural Community Development Initiative Grant	July 2025	\$500K	1:1
USDA Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE)	April 2025	\$2M	20%
Facilities for Underdeveloped Neighborhoods (FUN) Park Grant	August 2025	\$100K	None
Arkansas Economic Development Commission Small Business Funding Resources & Incentives			

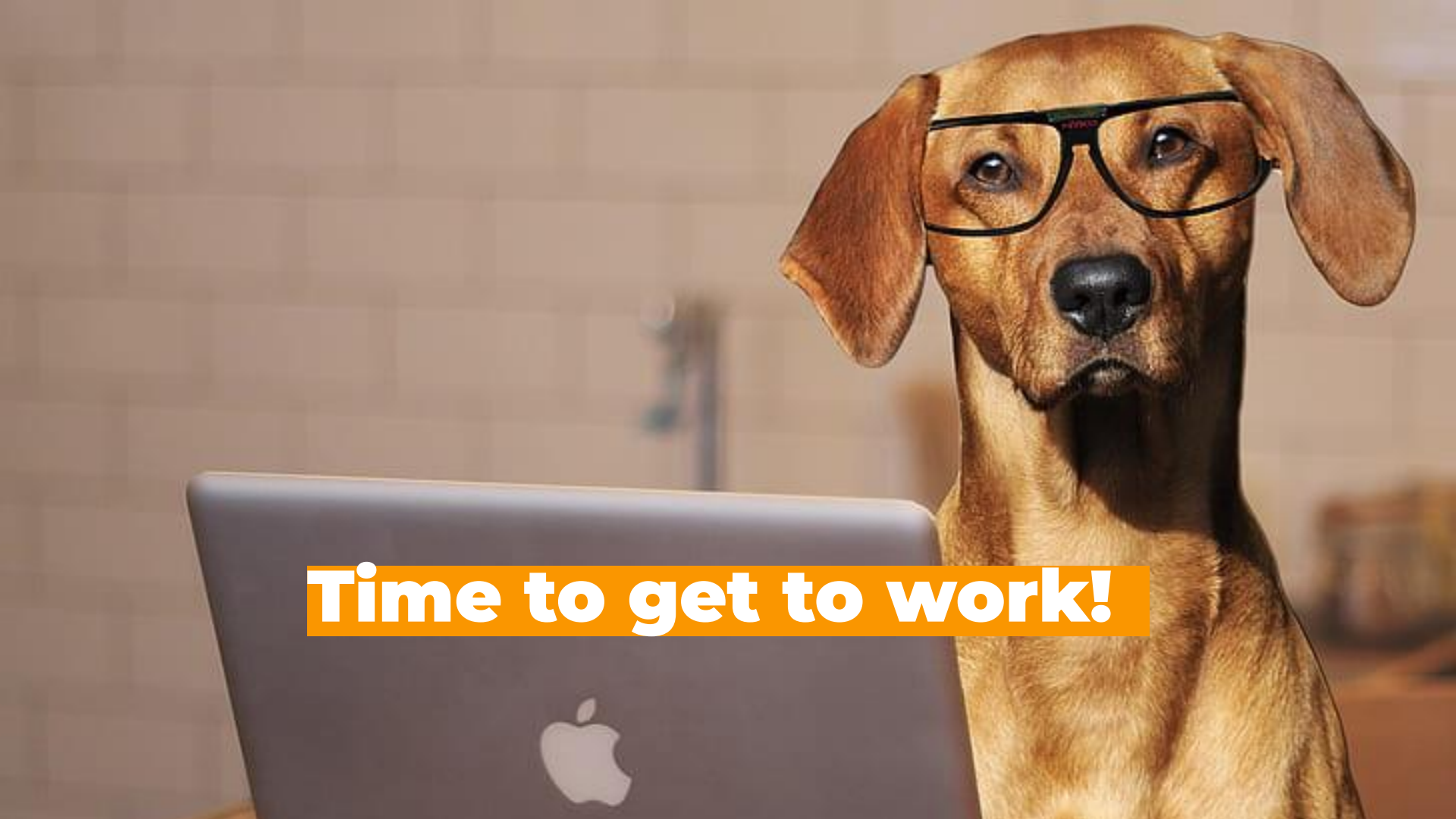
Funding

Priority Project 2

Support the development and expansion of small businesses that cater to outdoor recreation and amenities, while also improving access to and enhancing existing outdoor recreation facilities.

Next Steps

- #1: The Office of Outdoor Recreation Matching Grant Program to fund recreational asset inventory
 - Deadline: August 30, 2025
 - Match: 50%
- #2: Facilities for Underdeveloped Neighborhoods (FUN) Park Grant
 - Deadline: August 30, 2025
 - Match: None required



Time to get to work!

Implementation

Priority Project 1

Develop a marketing campaign that highlights Sevier County's outdoor attractions and promotes tourism-related activities.

- Define the campaign's primary goals.
 - Who? When?
- Identify target audiences and develop tailored messaging.
 - Who? When?
- Develop a comprehensive asset map.
 - Who? When?
- Identify existing marketing materials.
 - Who? When?

Infrastructure

Priority Project 1

Create a **countywide capital improvement plan** (CIP) to plan, prioritize, and maintain long-term investments in public infrastructure and facilities.

Goals

- Manage public funds efficiently by prioritizing projects based on community needs, long-term benefits, and available resources.
- Ensure the long-term functionality and safety of essential public infrastructure and public facilities by planning for necessary repairs, replacements, and upgrades.

Priority Project 1

Create a **countywide capital improvement plan** (CIP) to plan, prioritize, and maintain long-term investments in public infrastructure and facilities.

Next Steps

- Determine the Time Frame
- Assign Responsibilities
- Develop the CIP
- Present the CIP in a Work Session
- Present the CIP for Adoption
- Implementation and Monitoring
- Annual Review and Update

Priority Project 2

Conduct a **countywide housing needs assessment** and develop an action plan to address challenges and guide solutions.

Goals

- Identify the specific challenges and barriers residents face when seeking housing in the county.
- Develop community-specific solutions to improve housing accessibility and affordability.
- Identify local, state, federal, and private funding opportunities.

Priority Project 2

Conduct a **countywide housing needs assessment** and develop an action plan to address challenges and guide solutions.

Next Steps

- Secure Funding for a Needs Assessment
- Issue an RFP for a Needs Assessment
- Select a Partner to Conduct the Needs Assessment and Provide Support
- Review and Implement the Housing Needs Assessment
- Monitor and Evaluate

Priority Project 3

Develop a plan to **promote and market the De Queen Business Park** in order to attract new industry.

Goals

- Establish the business park as a premier location to attract businesses.
- Strengthen city and county financial resources through increased property and business tax revenue.
- Boost Sevier County's regional competitiveness by attracting investment.

Priority Project 3

Develop a plan to **promote and market the De Queen Business Park** in order to attract new industry.

Next Steps

- Gather and Share Essential Site Information
- Develop Marketing Strategies
- Preparing the De Queen Business Park for Development
- Conduct a Market Study
- Network
- Monitor and Evaluate

Funding

Priority Project 3

Develop a plan to promote and market the De Queen Business Park in order to attract new industry.

Source	Deadline	Max Award	Cost Share
EDA Public Works & Economic Adjustment Assistance Program	Rolling	\$30M	20-50%
USDA Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)	Feb. 28, 2025	No Max Typical Award ~\$10K-100K	None req.
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	October 2025	\$100K	50%
USDA Rural Community Development Initiative Grant	July 2025	\$500K	1:1

Funding

Priority Project 3

Develop a plan to promote and market the De Queen Business Park in order to attract new industry.

Next Steps

- EDA Public Works & Economic Adjustment Assistance Program
 - Market study for business park and outdoor recreation
 - Deadline: rolling



Time to get to work!

Implementation

Priority Project 2

Conduct a countywide housing needs assessment and develop an action plan to address challenges and guide solutions.

- Secure funding for a needs assessment.
 - Who? When?
- Draft and issue an RFP for a needs assessment.
 - Who? When?
- Select a partner to conduct the needs assessment.
 - Who?

One other opportunity...

- HHS CED grant-funded **job creation project**
 - invests in community development corporations (CDCs) that create and **expand businesses** and job opportunities
 - Max award: \$800,000; Min award: \$100,000
- Eligible activities:
 - Start-up capital for operating expenses
 - Loans to identified businesses
 - Equity or stock investment in identified businesses

One other opportunity...

- Eligible activities (cont'd):
 - Providing support services to employees of the participating businesses
 - Construction
 - Business development activities that lead to measurable job creation

One other opportunity...

- Local opportunities:
 - [AMS Global](#)
 - [Conquest Industrial](#)
 - Others?
- Estimated application due date: May 1, 2025
 - More information [HERE](#)
 - Opportunity Number: HHS-2025-ACF-OCS-EE-0118

Next Steps

Next Steps

- Deliver the Funding Resource Roadmap

Contact

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