

# 1. Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Days

Updated at Aug 05, 2026

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| Submission Date                                                                                                                   | Aug 5, 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Name of Initiative                                                                                                                | Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Days                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Contact Person                                                                                                                    | Ashley Evans                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Title                                                                                                                             | MHD Programming and Sponsorship Committe / Festival Photographer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Address                                                                                                                           | 1 University Way                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| City                                                                                                                              | Cullowhee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| State                                                                                                                             | NC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Zip Code                                                                                                                          | 28723                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Primary Phone Number                                                                                                              | 828-734-2284                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Email                                                                                                                             | aevans@wcu.edu                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Organization Type                                                                                                                 | Government                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Organization Tax ID                                                                                                               | 56-6001440                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Time of Year of Initiative                                                                                                        | Peak (April - November)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Describe the timing of the initiative in as much detail as possible (please list key project dates, milestones, timeframes, etc.) | <p>September is peak season for Jackson County. Mountain Heritage Day averages 15k visitors annually. With some creative upgrades to the festival's mission, it is our goal to attract additional visitors to the festival and region.</p> <p>The Friday night concert at Bridge Park is one way in which we wish to achieve success. We have secured a more prominent bluegrass band and added food vendors to kick off and lead the community into the full day festival at WCU on Saturday.</p> |

## Describe your initiative

## Mission:

Created in 1975, Mountain Heritage Day was an invitation from Chancellor Cotton Robinson to the local community for them to come together on the campus of WCU to celebrate the region's cultural richness. In its 52nd year, his initiative continues with Chancellor Kelli Brown at the helm, providing a fresh-high spirited take on a beloved tradition. Thanks to local and regional partnerships, WCU continues to provide free admission so all can celebrate while preserving the heart and soul of our beloved corner of southern Appalachia together.

## Event Description:

Mountain Heritage Day has now extended into Mountain Heritage Days which includes a week-long celebration of faculty and staff led seminars, museum exhibitions, heritage demonstrations, live bluegrass and mountain folk music, traditional dance, food, artisan crafts, and an additional Friday night concert in downtown Sylva at Bridge Park.

## Event Highlights:

- Five mainstage bluegrass, gospel, and folk music performances
- Friday night concert at Bridge Park in downtown Sylva
- Two clogging teams including the internationally recognized Bailey Mountain Cloggers
- Cherokee storytelling, Stickball demos and the Rooted in the Mountains conference
- Darnell Farms tractor rides
- Chainsaw Competition
- Classic Car Show
- MHD 5k Race
- Community awards presentation in recognition of outstanding contributions to the preservation or interpretation of the history and culture of Southern Appalachia; or in recognition of outstanding contributions to research in, or interpretation of, Southern Appalachian issues.
- Children's Tent area highlighting Appalachian music and crafts

## Describe what previous experience applicant has in successful execution of similar endeavors

WCU's Mountain Heritage Day is in its 52nd year, yielding approximately 12k-15k guests/patrons annually. The new structure of a week long event, formed in 2025, broadens the attraction of additional guests to include public access to unique Appalachian related seminars, museum exhibitions, while continuing to offer and focusing heavily on traditional southern Appalachian and Indigenous crafts and traditions throughout the week and during the festival on Saturday.

## Website

mhd.wcu.edu

## Social Media Channels - paste URLs below

<https://www.facebook.com/WesternCarolinaUniversity/>  
[https://www.instagram.com/western\\_carolina/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/western_carolina/?hl=en)  
<https://www.youtube.com/@WesternCarolinaU>  
<https://x.com/WCU>

## Amount of Funds Requested?

5,000

## Date Funds Needed

Sep 12, 2026

Give a narrative description of how this project will increase tourism and visitation in Jackson County

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If this initiative has occurred before, what is new that differentiates it from prior years?

In 2025, post cancellation of festival due to Hurricane Helene, WCU leaders and MHD committee members worked hard to reimagine the event to offer a richer, more immersive experience that blends tradition with innovation.

For example, last year was the first of hosting a Friday night concert at Bridge Park in Sylva with the idea of connecting tourist with the Saturday festival and also providing a night of free music to our host town community members.

This year, we have expanded the Bridge Park event/budget to host a higher-tier bluegrass band (Unspoken Tradition), extended the set time and added two food vendors to the one alcohol vendor. It is our hope that these changes will increase the visitors to the Sylva downtown area and the festival at WCU on Saturday.

What is your advertising and marketing plan for your initiative?

Marketing Plan:

Paid Media-

\$7500-digital/radio ads

\$2500/print ads

Total: \$10,000

- Billboards-static and digital
- Publications-Smoky Mountain News,Laurel of Asheville,Our State,Mountain Express,Sylva Herald
- Radio-iHeart and WKSF-FM / WNCW / Blue Ridge Public Radio

Analytic History:

- 2.8 million impressions
- 6k link clicks
- Google Display and Facebook/Instagram ads performed best

University Communications and Marketing:

- Social Media-Instagram and Facebook
- Inside WCU (WCU's faculty/staff newsletter)
- Stories related to event by communications team-website/local media

Do you agree to acknowledge the 'Jackson County TDA' in materials as required? Any releases or ad placements should have a statement that "the event was made possible, in part, by the Jackson County TDA." Print ad placements, where/when possible should include the JCTDA logo.

Yes

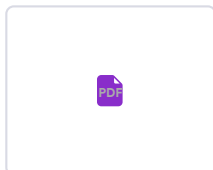
Total anticipated cost of initiative 60,000

Total funds your organization will provide toward total cost? 50,000

Detail funds requested from other sources and note commitments or anticipated receipt of funds from other sources

Sponsors to date include:  
Pepsi, Andy Shaw Ford, McNeely's, Republic Services, Anderson Renewal, Kate and Joe Sam Queen Foundation, LeafFilter, Chick-fil-A, Catamount Clothing and Gifts, Jackson Paper, Doug Davis Foundation

Please upload your detailed budget, including event or initiative expenses and revenue. You can attach a spreadsheet (Excel), PDF, or Word Document.



Anticipated Attendees from Jackson County: 6,000

Anticipated Attendees from outside Jackson County: 6,000

Anticipated overnight stays generated: 300

How did you determine audience/attendance numbers and where do they come from?

In recent past years, the festival documented attendance has by using hand counters at entry gates in addition to the number of parking spaces used on campus and in parking deck.

How will you measure success of your initiative?

We will use the analytics from our marketing plan to determine the amount of engagement from our paid marketing and online platforms. Attendance count from the Bridge Park Friday night concert and our week long additional events will help determine ROI.

Upload any supporting documentation for your application here:

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Days is extraordinarily grateful for the previous support and partnerships with JCTDA and the town of Sylva. We look forward to continuing to work together as we face the many challenges of keeping our communities healthy and attractive to visitors, while preserving the history and culture of our beloved corner of southern Appalachia.

Signature:



# 2025 WCU's Mountain Heriage Days Budget Re Sum of Amount

|                                    |           |                  |                                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Revenues</b>                    | <b>\$</b> | <b>53,880.24</b> |                                 |
| R07710 - Registration Fees         | \$        | 10,610.35        |                                 |
| R08400 - Intratransfers            | \$        | 11,681.89        | (11,681.89) next year royalties |
| R02600 - Cash Gifts-Non-Capital    | \$        | 25,955.00        |                                 |
| R04990 - Other Sales Of Goods      | \$        | 5,633.00         |                                 |
| <b>Expense</b>                     | <b>\$</b> | <b>40,213.66</b> |                                 |
| 2300BP - Purchased Services        | \$        | 4,467.08         |                                 |
| 3000BP - Supplies                  | \$        | 2,922.10         | 1,802.44 open purchase orders   |
| 2100BP - Purchased Cont. Supplies  | \$        | 32,775.08        |                                 |
| 5000BP - Other Expenses_adj_Budget | \$        | 49.40            | 4,196.50 open purchase orders   |
|                                    |           | 13,666.58        | \$ (4,014.25)                   |