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Community Foundation Awards Grants Totaling \$250,000 for Regional Wayfinding Project in Virginia's Blue Ridge

Roanoke, VA (October 16, 2019) – The Community Foundation announced today it has awarded \$250,000 in grants to five local jurisdictions to support tourism efforts to bring Wayfinding Signage to the region within Virginia's Blue Ridge footprint. The Cities of Roanoke and Salem and the Counties of Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke will each receive \$50,000 as part of a 2:1 challenge, with each jurisdiction committing an additional \$25,000 of their funds to the project. This will enable each jurisdiction to begin planning, purchasing and placing gateway, vehicular or pedestrian signage throughout each locality.

“These grants come from the Foundation’s unrestricted Community Catalyst Funds which allows us to respond to various needs in the community without being tied to a particular purpose. We are delighted to be in a position to provide significant support to bring regional wayfinding to this area,” says Michelle Eberly, the Community Foundation’s Director of Grants & Donor Engagement.

This project started in August 2017. Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge (VBR) chose Merje Design to develop a comprehensive wayfinding system to help navigate visitors and residents throughout VBR showcasing the region’s top assets. This strategic goal aligns with the Destination Vision Plan as well as the VBR brand and offers a consistent message with a subtle identity for each locality. (Note - This project adheres to the Virginia Department of Transportation sign guidelines)

“Wayfinding signage has long been needed in the region to assist the traveling public, especially in Franklin County where our diverse tourism assets are scattered over our 700 square miles. Providing visitors with a standard wayfinding system would seem to be a positive step towards the region’s banding of itself as a Mountain Metro area,” added Christopher Whitlow, Franklin County Interim Administrator.

Regional wayfinding objectives include:

- Increase economic impact by moving visitors throughout the region
- Increase overnight room nights
- Enhance visitor satisfaction by providing easy navigation
- Create repeat visitation by increasing awareness of destination assets
- Welcomes visitors to the region at gateway points
- Elevates VBR as a destination

“Tourism is BIG Business for Virginia’s Blue Ridge contributing over \$892 million in direct travel expenditures in 2018,” stated Lee Wilhelm, Visit VBR Foundation President. “Our goal is to reach \$1 billion in 2021, in order to do that programs such as wayfinding are critical. We are grateful to the Community Foundation for recognizing the economic benefits of supporting this project.”

About the Community Foundation - For more than 30 years, Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia

has enabled those who love the community to easily give back. The Foundation currently holds and administers over 330 named endowment funds established by individuals and families for the perpetual benefit of the community. Individuals interested in establishing their own personal or family legacy through an unrestricted endowment or any of the many other types of endowment funds offered by the community foundation should visit www.cfwesternva.org or call (540) 985-0204. #