

# DESOTO COUNTY TOURISM/CVB REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS



PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY SERVICES  
Tourism Industry Recovery, II

**Proposals due on or before 5:00 PM CST on April 3, 2023**

## **OBJECTIVE**

This RFQ has been issued to seek qualified firms who have a working knowledge of the tourism industry and can demonstrate the necessary experience to produce messaging and ad design and provide placement strategy for our leisure travel market. Although it is our intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, DeSoto County Tourism/CVB (DCT) may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.

DCT intends to contract with a qualified agency to support its continued recovery efforts that stemmed from the negative economic impacts of COVID-19. This contract will be funded through federal ARPA dollars for Mississippi Tourism Recovery, II.

This RFQ in no way commits DCT to award a contract, to pay any costs in preparation of a proposal or to contract for the goods and/or services offered. Although it is DCT's intent to contract with the agency that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, DCT may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.

## **SCOPE OF SERVICES**

DCT wishes to employ an outside agency to produce an overall creative strategy spanning at least 24 months, including destination marketing and messaging; design and creation of various collateral pieces, both for use as print and digital; and integrated marketing activities, including digital marketing, social media strategies, traditional print, broadcast media and other relevant components.

The agency should recommend an overall media creation and placement strategy to clearly position DCT to visitors as an affordable and attractive open destination for those who enjoy traveling, specifically in its top drive markets. It will be imperative to ensure this scope of services adheres to any changing public health guidelines and is conveyed in an informed manner.

The selected agency's responsibilities will include the below:

- Update, digitally publish and print destination guides, brochures, sales kits and other relevant DeSoto County marketing materials.
- Create a portfolio of new marketing assets, including photos, videos, and testimonials for use in promotional materials and sustainable travel campaign.
- Create campaigns for niche visitor segments based on behavior and travel trends (road trips, girlfriend getaways, pet-friendly etc.).
- Create and promote "Stay and Play" packages.

- Develop campaign to attract visitors to each of DCT's defined markets.
- Execute digital, print, broadcast and social media marketing campaigns through location and behavioral targeting.
- Target potential visitors searching for DCT or a competing market through programmatic buys.
- Create printed direct mailing pieces.
- Update and/or add in-market signage/kiosks at main attractions and hotels.
- Create and place billboard ads in key visitor markets.

## **ABOUT DESOTO COUNTY TOURISM**

DCT is a research-driven destination management and marketing organization with annual collections of approximately \$13M derived from the collection of a 2% food and beverage and lodging tax on the gross proceeds from hotel overnight room rental.

**DESTINATION WEBSITE:** [www.visitdesotocounty.com](http://www.visitdesotocounty.com)

## **DESTINATION BACKGROUND & STATE OF ECONOMY**

DCT is geographically located in the northwest section of Mississippi. Its population is approximately 185,000.

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant disruption to businesses in the hospitality sector including hotels, restaurants, and small businesses. Additionally, many tourism attractions experienced sharp declines in revenue and visitation.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE DETAILS**

Key markets we want to target are within a five-to-six-hour drive of DeSoto County. Key markets include but are not limited to: Memphis, Nashville and Jackson, TN; Jackson, Tupelo and Oxford, MS; Atlanta, GA; St. Louis, MO; and Little Rock and Jonesboro, AR.

## **AVAILABLE FUNDS**

**BUDGET:** DCT will fund this contract at \$492,973.00. This budget is based on creative production, strategy execution, media planning and placement (both online and offline), media placement fees, account management fees and out-of-pocket expenses. This budget can be implemented in phases over a two-to-four-year period, with year one requiring the largest amount of production. DCT reserves the right to adjust both the budget and related services.

**BILLING:** DCT limits invoicing to one invoice per month. Each invoice should be on letterhead from the selected agency and include the month(s) for which payment is due as well as detail of work completed at the mutually agreed upon rate(s) or amount in the executed contract.

## **NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID**

The Notice of Intent to Bid (attachment 1) is non-binding; however, it ensures the receipt of all addenda related to this RFQ. Proposals will be accepted only from applicants who submitted a timely Notice of Intent to Bid. Notice of Intent to Bid must be emailed by the deadline below with the subject line "Intent to Bid: Public Relations Agency Services" to [kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com](mailto:kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com).

## **OFFICIAL CONTACT**

DCT requests the proposer to designate one person to receive all communications for clarification and verification of information related to this proposal. Please identify this point of contact on the Notice of Intent to Bid Form (attachment 1).

## **TIMELINE**

This tentative timeline may be altered at any time at the discretion of DeSoto County Tourism and will be funded through federal ARPA dollars for Mississippi Tourism Recovery, II.

RFQ available to agencies.	March 6, 2023
Final day to submit Notice of Intent to Bid and questions regarding this RFQ.	March 24, 2023, by 5:00 PM CDT
Questions answered	March 27, by 5:00 PM CDT
<b>Proposals due by 5:00 PM CDT.</b>	<b>April 3, 2023, by 5:00 PM CDT</b>
Proposals evaluated by RFQ committee.	April 10-11, 2023
Agencies under consideration will be interviewed. Follow-up interviews will be conducted during this time frame as needed.	April 13-14, 2023
Agency selected and contract negotiations begin.	April 17, 2023
Work begins for a limited duration, decided in contract negotiations.	April 24, 2023

## **SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS & DELIVERABLES**

Your response to this RFQ must be submitted in the following format and labeled accordingly:

- A. Statement of Qualifications** – Provide a written statement of your firm’s qualifications for providing the work as described in the Scope of Work.
- B. Tourism Experience** – Provide a written statement of your involvement in the tourism industry, specifically with DMO clients, industry memberships and resources.
- C. Organization, Ownership, and Management**
  1. Name, address, and telephone number of the entity that will be contracted with and all trade names to be used.
  2. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the organization’s principal officers and other owners.
- D. Organization’s Structure and Experience**
  1. Organizational chart of company, including any subcontractors who will work with DCT.
  2. Total number of employees including full-time, part-time and contract workers.
  3. Short history of the company, especially as it relates to work in the tourism sector.
  4. Summary of employees who will work on the account including their name, title, a short summary of their qualifications and their main role in working with DCT.
  5. Hours of operation that staff will be available and any satellite offices.
  6. Experience as it relates to messaging, ad design, and placement strategy. No more than **three** relevant case studies should be provided, including project goals

with measurable KPIs and results. Creative work should be included for each case study.

**E. Client Information**

1. Current clients in declining order of size.
2. Name your two most recent past clients and reason for termination.
3. Name any travel/tourism clients and their current status.

**F. Account Gain and Loss**

1. Indicate if the agency has had a contract terminated for non-performance over the last five years with either litigation determining the agency at fault or no litigation due to inaction on part of the organization.
2. List of accounts gained over the last two years and why your organization was awarded the work.
3. Three references that are current accounts with contact names, email addresses, and phone numbers.

**G. Conflict(s) of Interest** – The proposer must declare and provide details of any actual, potential, or perceived conflict(s) of interest.

**H. Certification Form** – Certification Form (attachment 2) must be signed and accompany all RFQ Response submissions.

**I. Budget** – Please provide a proposed budget based on a full year of activities, strategy execution, account management, out-of-pocket expenses, and estimated costs related to hosting media that correspond to those detailed in your proposal. Note: Although DCT's fiscal year begins Oct. 1 and ends Sept. 30; please base your proposed budget on the calendar year, 12-month period.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

1. Submittals in response to this request and respondents' participation in the process shall be at no cost or obligation to DCT. DCT reserves the right to, at any time, abandon or terminate its efforts to contract for any or all of said services without any obligation to any respondent.
2. Responses to this request and other materials submitted shall become the property of DCT and will not be returned.
3. Respondent shall not contact any DCT personnel or staff after this request has been advertised, except to ask questions as specified below under "Respondent Questions." Such contact will be considered cause for disqualification.
4. DCT may waive any informalities or minor defects or reject any and all submittals.
5. DCT reserves the right to reject any submittal if the evidence submitted by, or investigation of, such respondent demonstrates that such respondent or its subcontractors, in DCT's opinion, is not properly qualified to carry out the obligations of the Contract or to complete the Work contemplated therein.
6. All applicable laws, ordinances, and the rules and regulations of all governmental authorities having jurisdiction shall apply to the Contract throughout.
7. This Contract is being funded through a grant provided to DCT by the State of Mississippi as part its ARPA State and Local Fiscal Relief Fund (SLFRF) allocation received from the

U.S. Treasury Department. The SLFRF program places numerous obligations on recipients and subrecipients, which flow down to successful respondent. Each respondent is cautioned to carefully review the *Supplemental Terms and Conditions* which are a part of the sample contract and to ensure that all responsibilities and obligations are properly addressed.

8. By executing a signature on the submittal, respondent certifies that:
  - a. Neither the respondent, nor any of its team members, is currently debarred from submitting proposals or entering into contracts issued by any political subdivision or agency of the State of Mississippi or the Federal Government.
  - b. No Federally appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the respondent, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.
  - c. If any funds other than Federally appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, respondent shall complete and submit Standard Form LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions.

## **EVALUATION & SELECTION**

DCT will establish a committee to evaluate and rate all proposals based on the criteria prescribed.

### **SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 1**

Proposals meeting all requirements of the RFQ will be evaluated by a review committee and ranked based on the following selection criteria. Top agencies will be chosen for Step 2.

- Tourism Industry Experience [25%]
- Qualifications to execute the plan of work, including costs of services [50%]
- References from past clients [10%]
- Evaluation of prior work [15%]

### **SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 2**

Top agencies will be invited to present, in person or via video conference, their suggested framework.

Presentations will be ranked by the following criteria:

- Agency's expertise in diverse but cohesive strategies for driving tourism demand. [60%]
- Ability to illustrate return on investment for suggested strategies. [25%]
- Suggestions to address current and forecasted traveler sentiment. [15%]

### **SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 3**

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to DCT, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFQ. Upon completing the selection process under this RFQ, DCT will notify the winning proposer and all other proposers who were not selected. DCT's evaluations of proposals are confidential and as such, DCT is unable to respond to any questions and/or requests for information as to why a company was not selected.

After awarding the contract, the schedule will include a period of collaboration between DCT and the selected agency to better define, elaborate upon, and update the agency's final Scope of Work and general Terms and Conditions. For the selected agency, an employee will be designated as your contact and will coordinate any materials needed or questions answered with all other DeSoto County Tourism employees.

### **STANDARD CONTRACT**

Following is a copy of DeSoto County Tourism's standard contract template to be referenced for this proposal. By responding to this request, the respondent is asserting its intent to accept the terms and conditions contained therein unless exceptions to the contract are provided as part of the respondent's submittal.

### **DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS**

Please submit your responses in hard copy and electronic format. All proposals should include a clear, concise narrative. Proposal format is open to presentation style but must include the aforementioned items.

It is advised, but not required, to submit five printed proposals (5).

Printed submissions must be marked "RFQ: Public Relations Agency Services" and delivered to:

DeSoto County Tourism  
c/o Kim Terrell, Director Tourism  
4560 Venture Dr.  
Southaven, MS 38671

Electronic submissions should be provided in PDF format and sent to [kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com](mailto:kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com) with the subject line: "RFQ: Public Relations Agency Services". Proposals may not be faxed.

Submittals received in any manner not specifically set forth above shall not be accepted or considered. Submittals received after the deadline will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the respondent to ensure that the submittal is received by the specified deadline. The delivery date and time will be recorded upon receipt. DeSoto County Tourism will not be responsible for late or incomplete responses due to mistakes or delays of the respondent or carrier used by the respondent or weather delays. A postmark will not be considered proof of timely submission.

### **QUESTIONS**

Note that all answers regarding questions and request for clarification for this RFQ will be responded to publicly consistent with the schedule below to ensure that all respondents have the same information.

Email your questions regarding this RFQ to the contact below by March 24, 2023, at 5:00 PM CDT at email address. No calls, please.

Kim Terrell  
Director of Tourism  
[kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com](mailto:kterrell@visitdesotocounty.com)