



CITY OF DULUTH

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR
TOURISM MARKETING SERVICES**

RFP NUMBER 24-AA07

ISSUED August 30, 2024

PROPOSALS DUE: Thursday, September 19, 2024 by 4:00 PM.

SUBMIT TO

**CITY OF DULUTH
ATTN: PURCHASING DIVISION
CITY HALL, ROOM 120
411 WEST 1ST STREET
DULUTH, MN 55802**

INTRODUCTION

Duluth, Minnesota is a popular travel destination attracting visitors from all parts of the world. The City of Duluth (City) is excited to share our unique culture, attractions, and adventures with tourists and is seeking responses from organizations with proven expertise in tourism marketing. As a city, we have an endless amount of compelling stories to share. We are looking for partners that can help us transform our stories into sophisticated marketing strategies, inspiring target audiences to choose Duluth as the location for their next travel experience whether that be leisure, events or conventions experiences.

The City and tourism partner, Visit Duluth is looking for a strategic and creative agency to increase tourism by generating increased awareness and demand. Innovative marketing strategies focused on tourism should drive economic benefits for the community and foster a travel economy that supports the other economic drivers of our city.

Campaign and strategic marketing work should holistically capture all facets of a Duluth travel experience including, art, culture and history, events, conferences and conventions, sports and recreation, and our natural environment.

CURRENT SITUATION

The selection of a marketing agency to provide destination marketing services for a two-year term, under the oversight of Visit Duluth (VISD). This two year marketing contract will focus on key areas crucial to maintaining and enhancing Duluth's appeal as a tourist destination. The structure and focus of this contract will serve as a transitional bridge between the existing destination marketing model and a reimagined, future-oriented framework.

The future framework includes the development of a long-term destination marketing model that will be guided by the results of a governance study, which is designed to align with the strategic goals set forth in a forthcoming Destination Development Plan. This strategic plan is still in the early stages of development but will be essential in shaping Duluth's tourism landscape.

A 10-year Operating Agreement to be contracted between the City of Duluth and the Destination Management Organization (DMO), ensuring continuity and stability as these new initiatives are implemented.

It's important to carefully select a marketing firm that can effectively manage the transitional period while also setting the stage for the future growth and success of Duluth as a premier travel destination.

KEY FOCUS AREAS:

Maintain and expand Duluth's place in Minnesota and the region's tourism industry: Duluth is a premier travel destination in Minnesota. Our goal is to remain the preferred travel location of current visitors and gain measurable market share by attracting new audiences.

1. **Leisure Travel:** Blend social and natural assets: Duluth is both a place for people to come together in the city and get out and experience nature. Highlight all neighborhoods, their relationship to nature and unique offerings.
2. **Art, Culture, and Historic Features:** capture and market the unique art, culture, and historic features of Duluth.
3. **Events, Conferences and Convention Center:** increase the visibility of events, meetings, conferences and City event venues.

OTHER PRIORITIES:

1. **Represent diversity:** BIPOC representation is essential in Duluth's marketing efforts. The city has a rich cultural history that should be fully told and celebrated. Work with local native nations and business owners of color to ensure accurate representation.
2. **Promote shoulder-season Travel:** Leverage travel opportunities in shoulder seasons to increase visits during non-peak times, benefiting the city, destinations, and travelers alike.
3. **Showcase free or low-cost entertainment and experiences:** Duluth shouldn't be perceived as an expensive destination. Free and low-cost opportunities should be promoted alongside more traditional experiences.

BUDGET

The City has historically provided an annual budget of up to \$2.2 million for tourism services. The 2025 marketing budget includes up to \$3 million allocated for overhead and marketing services focused on leisure travel, convention and event sales. Please use budget allocations to create a plan outlining how you would propose using this funding to execute on the 9 scope areas below.

SCOPE OF WORK

In your response document, please outline your experience and share relevant examples of your work in each of the following marketing disciplines:

1. Comprehensive Marketing Planning

Develop comprehensive annual marketing, advertising, and communications plans complete with recommended key performance indicators and other metrics that track the engagement of target audiences and accurately measure the return on the City's financial investment in all marketing-related activities.

2. Target Audience Mapping

Develop expanded target audience profiles including demographics, psychographics, personas, and media habits. Recommend new target audiences for Visit Duluth and the City to consider.

3. Creative Campaign Development

Develop modern and alluring creative campaign assets to increase target audience engagement across traditional, digital, and social media channels that builds on existing creative work currently in the market.

4. Website Management

Assist with content planning and development, structural updates (as recommended to support strategies), of the existing tourism website. Build on strategic SEO throughout website content to strengthen Duluth's online presence. Reporting on site traffic, conversion, performance, etc.)

5. Video and Photography

Assist with the development of visually compelling video and photo assets featuring Duluth's diversity in population, neighborhoods, and attractions. Assets created will be used on the City's tourism website and across all tourism marketing campaign channels and platforms.

6. Paid & Print Media

Develop plans and channel strategies with paid media platforms to stay relevant and competitive while continuously capturing the attention of new travelers. Print Media plans and strategies should include but not limited to, a destination visitor guide.

7. Earned Media

Develop, manage, and update a comprehensive list of targeted media outlets. Connect frequently with media targets to pitch captivating stories to secure earned media opportunities.

8. Social Media

Develop a comprehensive social media calendar and plan for organic and paid social media posts. Assist with social media content development, posting, community management, campaign metrics, and reporting.

9. Data, Analytics, and Reporting

Assist with capturing data from multiple sources, including advertising platforms, public relations efforts, social media, events, and other resources. Identify key data points, monitor success in real-time, and prepare performance reports monthly or as requested.

TIMELINE

TIMELINE The City will make every effort to adhere to the following schedule:

- August 30, 2024 RFP will be posted
- September 6, 2024 Questions to committee due
- September 12, 2024 Responses to questions due
- September 19, 2024 Proposals must be received by 4:00 p.m.
- September 23-27, 2024 Finalist presentations and interviews will be conducted
- October 1, 2024 Contracts will be awarded

RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS

Below is a list of the information we are interested in reviewing as a part of this process. We invite creative and professional liberty in how you prepare and present your proposal.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Background information on your company and any subcontractors you intend to work with on the project. Include owner bios, locations, years in operation, areas of core competency, and additional information you deem relevant to the selection process.
- Describe your experience and include relevant examples of work completed in each of the 9 marketing disciplines outlined. If you do not have experience in all 9 disciplines, please include information regarding all of those that apply.
- Include a list of key team member bios and experience.
- Provide a statement regarding why your company is best positioned to provide tourism marketing services to the City. Describe what differentiates your company.
- List of tourism-related clients in the past 1 – 5 years. Include 1 – 3 relevant case studies.
- Client references.

APPROACH:

- Clearly outline your recommended budget allocation; provide (at minimum) a breakdown of agency services and campaign planning, creative asset development, paid media, monthly campaign reporting and management, website management, and travel fees.
- If you charge a media or vendor markup, please describe your vendor markup policy.
- Outline what percent of this contract will be allocated to support your company overhead and break down your operating costs.
- Briefly describe your campaign planning and decision-making process.
- List key team members bios including subcontractors. Describe the role they would hold related to our account.
- Provide a statement regarding why your company is best positioned to provide tourism marketing services to the City. Describe what differentiates your company.
- Outline your client onboarding process over the next three to six months.

Response documents should not exceed 20 pages. The Proposal Cover Sheet (defined below) does not count towards the 20-page limit.

To be considered, sealed hard copies, along with a flash drive in a Microsoft Office-compatible or .pdf format of the proposal, must be received by the purchasing office located at 411 West 1st Street, Room 120, Duluth, MN 55802 no later than 4:30 p.m. on September 19, 2024.

The City reserves the right to reject or to deduct evaluation points for late proposals. Proposals must be signed by an authorized official. If the official signs the Proposal Cover Sheet attached as Appendix A, this requirement will be met. Proposals must remain valid for 60 days or until a contract is fully executed. The Awarded Proposer will be required to sign the standard City professional service agreement, a draft of which is attached to this Proposal. Please submit any questions or concerns about the agreement before you submit your proposal.

All materials submitted in response to this RFP will become the property of the City and will become public record after the selection process is completed and an award decision is made.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The proposals will be reviewed solely by City staff and appointed selection committee members. A 100-point scale will be used to create the final evaluation recommendations. The recommendation award will be presented to the City Council for ratification.

The criteria to evaluate a Respondent's proposal will include:

1. Agency location, background and qualifications.	30
2. Relevant Tourism Marketing Experience	20
3. Proposed plan and budget allocation related to the 9 scope areas, including agency services, creative asset development, paid media, reporting, and website management.	40
4. Client onboarding process	10

SMALL DIVERSE BUSINESS INFORMATION

The City values diversity and welcomes unique perspectives and we welcome information on how your company and proposal meet those values. As such, the City encourages participation by minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses as partners, subcontractors, and suppliers.

TERM OF CONTRACT

The term of the contract will begin once the contract is fully executed and is anticipated to end December 31, 2027. Selected partners shall not start the performance of any work, nor shall the City be liable to pay selected partners for any service or work performed or expenses incurred before the contract is executed.

**APPENDIX A - SUBMISSION COVER SHEET
CITY OF DULUTH
RFP 24-AA07
RFP for Tourism Marketing Services**

Bidder Information:	
Submitter Name	
Mailing Address	
Contact Person	
Contact Person's Phone Number	
Contact Person's E-Mail Address	
Federal ID Number	
Authorized Signature	
Name & Title of Authorized Signer	
Email of Authorized Signer	