

VISIT OXFORD REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: STRATEGIC PLAN & VISTOR PROFILE STUDY

Tourism Industry Recovery, II

Proposals due on or before 5:00 p.m. CDT on APRIL 20, 2023



OBJECTIVE

Oxford Tourism Council is issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek formal quotes from destination experts to develop a visitor profile study and 3–5-year strategic plan for Visit Oxford that will help guide the organization, stakeholders and the area’s tourism industry. This visitor study and strategic plan will provide a roadmap to Visit Oxford in how to maintain and enhance its positioning relative to competitive destination markets, as well as to identify growth markets for leisure travelers, as well as group meetings, conventions and sports travelers. Although it is Visit Oxford’s intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, Visit Oxford may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.

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

This RFP in no way commits Visit Oxford 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 Visit Oxford’s intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, Visit Oxford 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

Visit Oxford wishes to employ an outside firm to execute research culminating in a visitor profile study, as well as a 3-5-year strategic plan. The scope of services listed below is not intended to be a comprehensive list of what the firm will provide. The final scope of services will be developed in collaboration with the selected firm.

The selected firm’s responsibilities will include the following:

- Identify and assess gaps in the area’s tourism infrastructure which, if filled, would position Oxford as a competitive, top-tier leisure, meeting and sports destination market.
- Review and assess the current branding and existing marketing strategy.
- Create key performance indicators to measure and track goal achievement.
- Identify potential new or enhanced tourism demand generators.
- Strategize to enhance attractions, events or assets to drive demand.
- Identify how tourism impacts the workforce and drives population growth.

In order to achieve these responsibilities, the selected firm will:

- Review the economic impact of Oxford’s tourism industry and supporting data.
- Conduct surveys with visitors that include leisure, group meetings, conventions and sports travelers.
- Identify target markets, services areas and organizational strategies to enhance Oxford’s tourism industry.
- Research various destinations that Visit Oxford can compare and benchmark itself against.

DELIVERABLES:

- A comprehensive written report presented to Visit Oxford and the Oxford Tourism Council upon completion of the project.

- An assessment of the existing tourism product in Oxford with an analysis of strengths and future opportunities.
- An overall evaluation of Visit Oxford’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Emphasis should be placed on how the area’s assets can be used to attract increased visitors.
- An assessment of the effectiveness and adequacy of the current destination marketing program and recommended strategies to improve these initiatives. Particular emphasis should be provided on how Visit Oxford can enhance these efforts to ensure the overall increased visitation goal is met. This assessment should include recommended operating guidelines for the programs to achieve the desired development results.

ABOUT VISIT OXFORD

Visit Oxford is a research-driven destination management and marketing organization with annual collections of approximately \$1M, derived from the collection of a 2% lodging tax on the gross proceeds from hotel overnight room rental, as well as a portion of a 2% food and beverage tax on the gross proceeds of prepared food and beverage within the city of Oxford.

Visit Oxford’s mission is to bring visitors to Oxford for the economic impact on the community. Touted as the “Cultural Mecca of the South,” creativity abounds in Oxford as musicians, artists and writers alike find inspiration in its rich history, small town charm and creative community. Over the years, Oxford has become known for offering exceptional culinary experiences, as well as for being home of the University of Mississippi and was recently dubbed as “America’s Best College Town.”

DESTINATION WEBSITE

www.VisitOxfordMS.com

DESTINATION BACKGROUND & STATE OF ECONOMY

Oxford is geographically located in the northern part of Mississippi. Its population is approximately 28,000, which swells to nearly 50,000 when the University of Mississippi is in full session. Annual visitor spending for FY21 was \$172.6 million, generating \$16.2 million in state and local taxes and supported 2000 jobs, nearly 8% of Oxford’s employment base.

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 revenues and visitation. FY19 showed visitor spending at an all-time high of \$177.3 million with attributed taxes corresponding at a staggering \$16.2 million. With the on-set of COVID-19, visitation and spending dropped dramatically. FY20 spending dropped to \$145.9 million, a drop of over \$30 million, with attributed taxes coming in at \$13.2 million, numbers that the Oxford economy had not seen since FY15. Local 2% lodging tax collections dropped 34%, from \$447,380 in FY19 to \$294,178 in FY20 due to the COVID pandemic. Similarly, 2% food and beverage tax collections dropped 15% overall, from \$3,397,834 in FY19 to \$2,890,519 in FY20.

In Fall 2020, Visit Oxford received funding through the CARES Act Funding and Tourism Recovery Funds. With the money that was immediately put into market, Visit Oxford was able to recover more quickly than other tourism destinations throughout the country. By the end of Fiscal Year 2021, Oxford saw increases in total visitor spending, as well as state/local taxes attributed to tourism, climbing back to \$172.6 million and \$16.2 million, respectively. Food and beverage tax revenue was up 26% from the previous fiscal year and lodging tax revenue was up 41% for the same period.

TARGET AUDIENCE DETAILS

A visitor travel profile was done in 2016-2017 that indicated that overnight leisure travel parties consist of middle-aged adults or families with children who are well educated and/or retired professionals. These visitors travel from a 3–6-hour drive radius among contiguous states, with the exception of Atlanta, Dallas and Houston, which are top feeder markets for the University. Top primary markets include Memphis, TN; Birmingham, AL; Atlanta, GA; Jackson,

MS; Nashville, TN; Little Rock, AR; Dallas, TX; St. Louis, MO; Houston, TX. Visit Oxford will remain focused on the leisure drive market in primary markets and will continue to focus on small group travel around themed campaigns such as girlfriend getaways, foodie enthusiasts and collegiate sports travel. Visit Oxford will continue its strong partnerships with local sports facilities to continue recruiting youth sports tournaments, as well as enhancing incoming Ole Miss fan experiences and retarget those visitors for a non-athletic related repeat visit. For meetings and conventions, Visit Oxford will focus on specific publications targeted to the meeting planner markets to increase Sunday-Thursday overnight business. Finally, Visit Oxford will engage more heavily in international markets now that travel has returned for those markets post-pandemic.

NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID

The Notice of Intent to Bid (Addendum) is non-binding; however, it ensures the receipt of all addenda related to this RFP. **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: Strategic Plan and Visitor Profile Study" to kinney@visitoxfordms.com and nadia@visitoxfordms.com.

OFFICIAL CONTACT

Visit Oxford requests the proposer 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 (Addendum).

TIMELINE

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

RFP available to agencies.	MAR. 24, 2023
Final day to submit questions regarding this RFP.	APR. 3, 2023, by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Final day to submit Notice of Intent to Bid.	APR. 10, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Questions answered	APR. 10, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. CDT.	APR. 20, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Proposals evaluated by RFP committee.	MAY 3-8, 2023
Firms under consideration will be interviewed. Follow-up interviews will be conducted during this time frame as needed.	MAY 9-11, 2023
Firm selected, and contract negotiations begin.	MAY 15, 2023
Work begins for a limited duration, decided in contract negotiations.	JUNE 5, 2023

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS & DELIVERABLES

Your response to this RFP 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
 - a. Name, address and telephone of the entity that will be contracted with and all trade names to be used.
 - b. Name, address and telephone numbers of the organization’s principal officers and other owners.
- D. Organization’s Structure and Experience
 - a. Organizational chart of company, including any subcontractors who will work with Visit Oxford.
 - b. Total number of employees including full time, part time and contract workers.
 - c. Short history of the company, especially as it relates to work in the tourism sector.
 - d. 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 Visit Oxford.

- e. Hours of operation that staff will be available and any satellite offices.
 - f. Experience as it relates to knowledge of existing tourism and state association trends and key goals and ability to present findings in a useful manner. No more than three relevant case studies should be provided, including project goals with measurable KPIs and results.
- E. Client Information
- a. Current clients in declining order of size
 - b. Name your two most recent past clients and reason for termination.
 - c. Name any travel/tourism clients and their current status.
- F. Account Gain and Loss
- a. Indicate if the firm 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.
 - b. List of accounts gained over the last two years and why your organization was awarded the work.
 - c. Three references that are current accounts with contact names, email 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 (Addendum) must be signed and accompany all RFP Response submissions.
- I. Budget – Please provide a proposal budget based on the project’s full scope of work. This budget should include strategy execution, account management, out-of-pocket expenses and any costs related to traveling to Oxford.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

1. Submittals in response to this request and respondents' participation in the process shall be at no cost or obligation to Visit Oxford. Visit Oxford 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 Visit Oxford and will not be returned.
3. Respondent shall not contact any Visit Oxford 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. Visit Oxford may waive any informalities or minor defects or reject any and all submittals.
5. Visit Oxford 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 Visit Oxford'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 Visit Oxford 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.

SMALL, MINORITY & WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES:

In compliance with federal and state statutes, Visit Oxford encourages small, minority and women-owned businesses to respond to this RFP. As such, this RFP will also be placed on MS PTAP at the time of publication to ensure equal opportunity for all to respond.

EVALUATION & SELECTION

Visit Oxford 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 RFP 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 cost 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:

- Ability to provide thorough and practical recommendations for 3-5 year strategic plan [45%]
- Ability to illustrate strategies that relate to accomplishing the goals of the project [25%]
- Suggestions to address current and forecasted visitor profile [15%]
- Pricing [15%]

Selection Process – Step 3

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to Visit Oxford, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFP. Upon completing the selection process under this RFP, Visit Oxford will notify the winning proposer and all other proposers who were not selected. Visit Oxford's evaluations of proposals are confidential and as such, Visit Oxford 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 Visit Oxford and the selected firm to better define, elaborate upon, and update the firm's final Scope of Work and general Terms and Conditions. For the selected firm, an employee will be designated as your contact and will coordinate any materials needed or questions answered with all other Visit Oxford employees.

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 "RFP: Strategic Plan and Visitor Profile Study" and delivered to:

Visit Oxford
c/o Kinney Ferris
1013 Jackson Ave. East
Oxford, MS 38655

Electronic submissions should be provided in PDF format and sent to kinney@visitoxfordms.com and nadia@visitoxfordms.com with the subject line: "RFP: Strategic Plan and Visitor Profile Study." 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. Visit Oxford 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 RFP will be responded to publicly consistent with the schedule above to ensure that all respondents have the same information.

Email Kinney Ferris and Nadia Thornton with any questions by April 3, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. CDT at kinney@visitoxfordms.com and nadia@visitoxfordms.com. No calls, please.