



CITY OF DULUTH

**REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR
TOURISM MARKETING SERVICES**

RFQ NUMBER 21-AA21

ISSUED MAY 17, 2021

RESPONSES DUE FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 2021

SUBMIT RESPONSES TO:

**CITY OF DULUTH
PURCHASING DIVISION
PURCHASING@DULUTHMN.GOV**

INTRODUCTION

As leaders and representatives entrusted with strengthening Duluth's future, we're seeking marketing partners to help bring our new vision for Duluth to life.

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.

The City is seeking a partner or partners who will bring innovative marketing strategies and storytelling capabilities to the table. We want to elevate the brand of Duluth and position the city as a welcoming and safe destination with a rich history and abundance of attractions to explore.

CURRENT SITUATION

The City of Duluth invests public funds into tourism promotion and marketing, as required by enabling legislation for the collection and distribution of tourism taxes. Specifically, the City is required to invest a mandated portion of collections but has chosen to invest well beyond that to broaden impact and build a more robust tourism economy. We see this investment level as being "flexible" based upon the shared goals of stakeholders and the City. The City has worked with one tourism promotion and marketing entity (Visit Duluth) to achieve results in this area, with that contract expiring December 31, 2021. This is the first year the City is choosing a public RFQ for the allocation and investment of this portion of public funds.

The City also invests tourism tax dollars into entities, attractions, programs, events and key investment areas to help the tourism industry build upon its own momentum. The City also considers these investments to be "flexible," in that – as long as they meet criteria as outlined by legislation and a public application process, the City is able to invest an amount of its choosing. In an effort to achieve greater transparency and public accounting of public funds, the City launched a public and competitive process for these funds five years ago, rather than provide allocation out of habit.

The remaining portion of tourism tax collections are explicitly tied to the local match of projects funded via state bond issuance. Examples include the DECC Amsoil Arena and the Lower Chalet of Spirit Mountain.

Providing context to inform the RFQ submission in terms of budget capacity: tourism tax collection in 2019 was approximately \$12.4 million. Of that, \$6,198,984 went to required bond repayment; \$4,173,715 to internal or external tourism-supporting entities, attractions, programs, events and key investment areas, and; \$2,000,000 to support tourism promotion and

marketing - amounting to approximately 32.4% of the “flexible” investment being directed into tourism promotion and marketing.

We are eager to receive submissions for the vision of tourism promotion and marketing for Duluth that support the following scope of work and key areas of focus.

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 measures 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 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.

- 4. Website Development**

Assist with design, development, and maintenance of a tourism website for the City. Implement strategic SEO throughout website content to strengthen Duluth’s online presence.

- 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. 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.

- 7. 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.

8. Art, Culture, and Historic Features

Create a comprehensive plan to capture and market the unique art, culture, and historic features of Duluth.

9. Events and Convention Center

Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to increase the visibility of events and City event venues.

10. 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.

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

1. **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.
2. **Blend social and natural assets:** Duluth is both a place for people to come together in the city and get out and experience nature. Marketing events, activities, and businesses alongside Duluth's incredible natural assets will tell a complete story of what Duluth offers.
3. **Better 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.
4. **Share compelling stories** – Duluth has a plethora of incredible stories to share. It is imperative we expand our content asset library to include copy, images, and videos featuring all neighborhoods and niche areas of interest.
5. **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.
6. **Beyond 'heads in beds'** – It will be important to establish KPIs that measure quality of experiences of any duration – including day trips - not just quantity of visitors or revenue generated. Memories created can translate to future repeat visits.

TIMELINE

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

- May 17, 2021 RFQ is issued
- May 25, 2021 Deadline to submit questions
- May 28, 2021 Answers to questions will be posted to the City website
- June 4, 2021 RFQ response documents must be received by 4:30 p.m.
- June 11, 2021 Finalists will be notified and interviews will be scheduled
- June 14 – 25, 2021 Finalist interviews will be conducted
- July 12, 2021 RFP will be issued to selected partners
- July 23, 2021 Proposals must be received 4:30 p.m.
- July 26 – 29, 2021 Final interviews will be conducted and 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 give you creative and professional liberty in how you prepare and present your response document and showcase your 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 10 marketing disciplines outlined. If you do not have experience in all 10 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.
- Response documents should not exceed 20 pages. The Proposal Cover Sheet (defined below) does not count towards the 20-page limit.

The City is not asking for price proposals to accompany the RFQ response document. The City is only interested in reviewing the qualifications and experience of respondents at this time. An RFP will be sent to finalists on July 12, 2021.

To be considered, your response document must be received by the purchasing office via e-mail at purchasing@duluthmn.gov no later than 4:30 p.m. on June 4, 2021. The City reserves the right to reject or to deduct evaluation points for late proposals. Response documents must be signed by an authorized official. If the official signs the Response Cover Sheet attached as Appendix A, this requirement will be met.

All materials submitted in response to this RFQ 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 response documents will be reviewed by city staff and a third-party consultant in order to develop a short list of candidates who will be invited to participate in the RFP process.

The criteria to evaluate a Respondent's technical qualifications will include:

1. Background Information
2. Personnel and Staffing
3. Professional Marketing Experience Related to the 10 Scope Areas
4. Relevant Tourism Marketing Experience
5. Actual or Potential Conflicts of Interest

SMALL DIVERSE BUSINESS INFORMATION

The City values diversity and welcomes unique perspectives. 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, 2022. The contract may be extended for up to two years at the discretion of the City. 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.

MANDATORY DISCLOSURES

By submitting a proposal, each Respondent understands, represents, and acknowledges that:

A. Their proposal has been developed by the Respondent independently and has been submitted without collusion with and without agreement, understanding, or planned common course of action with any other vendor or suppliers of materials, supplies, equipment, or services described in the Request for Qualifications.

B. There is no conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists if a Respondent has any interest that would actually conflict, or has the appearance of conflicting, in any manner or degree with the performance of work on the project. If there are potential conflicts, identify the municipalities, developers, and other public or private entities with whom your company is currently, or have been, employed and which may be affected.

C. It is not currently under suspension or debarment by the State of Minnesota, any other state or the federal government.

D. The company is either organized under Minnesota law or has a Certificate of Authority from the Minnesota Secretary of State to do business in Minnesota, in accordance with the requirements in M.S. 303.03.

REJECTION OF PROPOSALS

The City reserves the right, in its sole and complete discretion, to reject any and all proposals or cancel the request for proposals at any time before the time a contract is fully executed, when in its best interests. The City is not liable for any costs the proposer incurs in preparation and submission of its proposal, in participating in the RFQ process, or in anticipation of award of the contract.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Any questions regarding the RFQ must be submitted by e-mail to the Purchasing Office at purchasing@duluthmn.gov no later than May 25, 2021. Answers to the questions will be posted on the city's purchasing page at <http://www.duluthmn.gov/purchasing/bids-request-for-proposals/> as an addendum to the RFQ.

From the issue date of this RFQ until a selection decision is made, the purchasing office is the sole point of contact concerning this RFQ. Any violation of this condition may be cause for the rejection of your proposal.

**APPENDIX A - RESPONDENT COVER SHEET
CITY OF DULUTH
RFP# 21-AA21**

Respondent Information:	
Company Name	
Mailing Address	
Contact Person	
Contact Person's Phone Number	
Contact Person's E-Mail Address	
Federal ID Number	
Authorized Signature	
Title	