



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

For: Tourism Advertising and/or Public Relations Agency(ies)

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation is soliciting a Request for Proposal (RFP) from a qualified firm or firms to retain an advertising and/or public relations agency to assist with the development of the Rhode Island brand and promote tourism. Proposers are invited to respond to the advertising scope of work only, the public relations scope of work only, or both scopes of work. An RFP has also been released for a Business Attraction Advertising and/or Public Relations Agency(ies) and agencies are welcome to apply for both Tourism and Business Attraction Public Relations or Advertising sectors if applicable.

The results of these efforts will benefit Rhode Island Commerce Corporation assessed businesses, as well as in-state Destination Marketing Organizations by increasing tourism revenue and, on a larger scale, increasing the employment base for the State of Rhode Island.

The contract period for the Scope of Work contained within this RFP will be approximately the first quarter of 2017 to June 30, 2018. Rhode Island Commerce Corporation's fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30.

Proposers are invited to respond to the advertising scope of work only, the public relations scope of work only, or both scopes of work. Proposers should state clearly in their response whether they are responding to the advertising scope, public relations scope, or both. If a Proposer seeks to respond to both the advertising and public relations scope, it should submit a two-part response, one part addressing advertising and one part addressing public relations with separate information on strategy, personnel, budget and costs for each component. This is important as the advertising and public relations proposals will be scored separately. Finally, Proposers responding to both advertising and public relations components should be mindful that they may be awarded one component of the scope of work but not the other.

Project Overview

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (the "Corporation") seeks a firm or firms able to develop an advertising campaign and/or a public relations strategy; manage production and development of creative that inspires, informs and drives action; evaluate media opportunities and plan media buys; cultivate promotional & strategic partnerships; and provide research & analytics. The chosen agency(ies) will work collaboratively with website and social media partners.

Background

Tourism is an important driver of the Rhode Island economy. As of 2013, tourism to Rhode Island contributed \$2.38 billion to the state's economy, supported over 39,000 jobs, and provided more than \$1 billion in wages and salaries.

The Corporation is committed to growing the state's tourism industry through:

- increasing traveler trips to Rhode Island;
- increasing average traveler spend per trip; and
- increasing resident spend on tourism activities.

The Corporation promotes Rhode Island in the domestic and international marketplaces, leveraging multiple marketing and communications tactics, including but not limited to traditional public relations strategies, advertising, social media, public engagement programs, travel trade and sales outreach. All of these efforts are directed at our target audiences—prospective visitors, previous visitors, Rhode Island residents, transportation partners, tour operators, travel agents, industry partners and NGO's.

Instructions and Notifications to Offerors

1. Potential agencies are advised to review all sections of this RFP carefully and to follow instructions completely, as failure to make a complete submission as described elsewhere herein may result in rejection of the proposal.
2. Alternative approaches and/or methodologies to accomplish the desired or intended results of this procurement are solicited. However, proposals that depart from or materially alter the terms, requirements, or scope of work defined by this RFP will be rejected as being non-responsive.
3. All costs associated with developing or submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, or to provide oral or written clarification of its content, shall be borne by the agency. The Corporation assumes no responsibility for such costs.
4. Proposals are considered to be irrevocable for a period of not less than 120 days following the date set for submission of agency proposals.
5. All pricing submitted will be considered to be firm and fixed unless otherwise indicated herein.
6. Proposals misdirected to other locations, or that are otherwise not present at the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation by the submission deadline for any cause will be determined to be late and will not be considered. For the purposes of this requirement, the official time and date shall be that of the time clock in the reception area of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation.

7. All proposals should identify the agency's proposed team of professionals, including those employed by subcontractors, if any, along with respective areas of expertise and relevant credentials. Agencies should also provide a delineation of the portion of the scope of work for which each of these professionals will be responsible.
8. All proposals should include the agency's FEIN or Social Security number as evidenced by a W9, downloadable from www.purchasing.ri.gov.
9. The purchase of services under an award made pursuant to this RFP will be contingent on the availability of funds and made at the discretion of the Corporation.
10. Awarding this RFP is based on the criteria set forth below. **This RFP does not request any new or proposed advertising creative specific to this project.** Agencies are advised, however, that all materials and ideas submitted as part of this proposal and during the performance of any award shall be the property of and owned by the Corporation, which may use any such materials and ideas.
11. Interested parties are instructed to peruse the Corporation's website (www.commerceri.com) on a regular basis, as additional information relating to this solicitation may be released in the form of an addendum to this RFP. Addenda will also be posted to the Rhode Island State Division of Purchases' website at www.purchasing.ri.gov.
12. Equal Employment Opportunity (R.I. Gen. Laws § 28-5.1-1, *et seq.*) – § 28- 5.1-1 Declaration of policy – (a) Equal opportunity and affirmative action toward its achievement is the policy of all units of Rhode Island state government, including all public and quasi-public agencies, commissions, boards and authorities, and in the classified, unclassified, and non-classified services of state employment. This policy applies to all areas where State dollars are spent, in employment, public services, grants and financial assistance, and in state licensing and regulation.
13. In accordance with Title 7, Chapter 1.2 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, no corporation organized under the laws of another state or country shall have the right to transact business in Rhode Island until it shall have procured a Certificate of Authority to do so from the Rhode Island Secretary of State (401-222-3040). This is a requirement only of the successful agency(ies).
14. The agency should be aware of the State's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) requirements, which address the State's goal of ten percent (10%) participation by MBE's in all procurements. For further information, visit the website www.mbe.ri.gov.
15. The Corporation reserves the right to award to one or more Proposers.

Scope of Work - Advertising

For each of the following project areas, the Proposer should prove capability describing strategies to be used and quality controls. Sufficient detail must be given and must include

examples of past projects, ability to meet deadlines and managerial experience. The Proposer should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of brand in a global marketplace, and the shifting dynamics of how consumers receive and use information today.

Strategic Planning: Provide us with an “insider’s look” at your strategic account planning process. What goes into the development of a plan? What type of research do you do?

Advertising Campaign Development: Demonstrate how your agency develops a holistic approach to client brand advertising, integrating interactive, including social, into the overall strategy. Include how your media planning has changed due to barriers affecting traditional frequency and reach via TV – e.g. video on demand, recording devices, etc. How does your agency approach extend beyond that 30-second spot? Exemplify how your agency has evolved based on the way consumers are receiving and using their information today.

Production/Creative: Do you do production in-house? If not, how do you manage production? Is your creative team located in the office that this account will be managed? Show current and/or past client examples of how your brand development moves across all mediums.

Media Planning & Buying: Provide us with your process in deciding where, when, and how to purchase media. What tools or analytics do you use? What are the determining elements that make your purchasing decisions? Optimization strategy? Co-op Strategy? Give us an overview of your philosophy as it relates to planning and buying media domestically and internationally, including Asia.

Promotional and Strategic Partnerships: Where do strategic partnerships or alliances fit into your overall approach? How have you used strategic partnerships to extend a client’s budget and exposure?

Social Media: Show us how you integrate social media into a brand strategy and how you would approach a global social strategy. The Corporation currently manages all social profiles internally, but is interested in hearing your thinking on how a brand our size should resource to efficiently manage a global social footprint. At a minimum, we would look to the winning Proposer to provide the overarching social strategy and guidance on implementation.

Research & Analytics: Provide an overview of how you determine success. What are the analytic tools or services that you use, and what type of information will you be reporting back to the Corporation as it relates to meeting our objectives? Please define how your analytics can be converted into insights, and how the insights will help guide us in making decisions on how we market in the future.

Travel and Administration: The Proposer should estimate travel to the Corporation board meetings, monthly meetings (can be done virtually), communication and postage/shipping expenses expected to be incurred during contract period, and any additional reserve funds to be held for marketing contingencies. Travel and per diem expenses shall not exceed rates authorized by the Corporation's Travel and Expense Policy.

Scope of Work - Public Relations

The Corporation requires a Proposer(s) to provide public and media relations initiatives including but not limited to strategic planning, partnership opportunities, media relations and activating media events and programs, content creation and distribution, and to assist other functions of the Corporation as needed. From time to time support may be required for travel trade media as well as support for domestic media projects and events.

Core Services

At a minimum, the Proposer(s) should be able to perform the following services under the strategic direction of the Corporation staff:

Strategic Planning: Support the development and writing of the communications plan; Conduct research for, and provide input to, a multi-year U.S. public and media relations plan; Establish program KPIs and measures to deliver against; Execute required items from the plan as requested; Provide required reporting to the Corporation on performance of the multi-year plan.

Public and Media Relations: Identify potential projects where the Corporation would be able to work with appropriate media and brands; Identify trade shows and events worthy of consideration for the Corporation; Promote the destination at relevant events.

Media Relations: Provide ongoing media relations support representing Rhode Island's unique story and targeted media opportunities; Align partner priorities to provide direct referrals to regional marketing organizations; Maintain strong relationships with a diversity of U.S. media across multiple channels in the tourism, lifestyle and other relevant sectors; Review and analyze incoming U.S. media queries for information; Proactive pitching based on strategic plan; Provide recommendations to the Corporation and follow up with journalists as required; Organize and execute media events and familiarization (fam) tours; Arrange and manage media appointments for community representatives in key domestic markets; Secure journalists to visit Rhode Island either individually or in groups.

Content Creation and Distribution: Create and share relevant media materials and messaging; Monitor the content being created as a result of the Corporation's efforts; Develop tourism content as it relates to the Corporation/tourism events/projects and campaigns. This includes, but is not limited to: press releases, backgrounders, story idea pitches and other press materials, key

messages, speeches, etc.; Identify appropriate distribution channels (e.g. newswire agencies, trade shows, media distribution lists and networks, etc.); Manage the distribution of content across these channels.

Social Media: Show us how you integrate social media into a brand strategy and how you would approach a global social strategy. The Corporation currently manages all social profiles internally, but is interested in hearing your thinking on how a brand our size should resource to efficiently manage a global social footprint. At a minimum, we would look to the winning Proposer to provide the overarching social strategy and guidance on implementation.

Research & Analytics: Provide an overview of how you determine success. What are the analytic tools or services that you use, and what type of information will you be reporting back to the Corporation as it relates to meeting our objectives? Please define how your analytics can be converted into insights, and how the insights will help guide us in making decisions on how we market in the future.

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Qualifications

The Proposer(s) should be an experienced and qualified public relations and/or advertising firm able to support our global communications and programs. The Proposer(s)' account manager and team must have five years' experience working with U.S. travel media. The ideal Proposer(s) should be: known for their strong reputation for excellent advertising and/or public and media relations work in the U.S.; familiar with Rhode Island's tourism brand, partners and industry; established within the U.S. travel and lifestyle media; on top of the latest trends and best practices in advertising, public and media relations, and content marketing; flexible, organized, customer-service oriented and a team player; and exceptional writers with strong communication skills.

In addition to the qualifications above, the Proposer should have demonstrated relationships with national and regional print and broadcast media including travel trade media.

Project Timeline

The successful Proposer(s) will enter into a contract for services with the Corporation. The duration of the initial contract between the Corporation and the successful Proposer is expected to begin upon the date of contract approval (expected in the first quarter of 2017) and terminate

on June 30, 2018. The Corporation reserves the right to renew its agreement prior to the end of each contract term for a total of three (3) years, providing funding to do so is appropriated for this purpose in subsequent budgets. There will be a 6-month oral review in 2017 and subsequent reviews annually in each year the contract is renewed. Proposed renewals are also assessed according to program direction, funding, and consistency of price and scope of work continuity.

Budget

Include comprehensive pricing and/or rate sheet for all potential services you might provide under this RFP should you be selected as a service provider.

Budget should include account management fees, out-of-pocket expenses, and, as applicable for advertising proposals, placement (print, broadcast, digital and social). Travel to and from the Corporation offices, and the costs associated with it, will be the responsibility of the Proposer. However, the Corporation reserves the right to adjust both the budget and related services.

Criteria for Selection

Designated Corporation staff will evaluate the written proposals. The advertising and public relations proposals will be scored separately. The Corporation may at any time during the evaluation process seek clarification from Proposers regarding any information contained within their proposal. Final scores for each Proposer will reflect a consensus of the staff evaluations.

Any attempt by a Proposer to contact a member of Corporation staff, in an attempt to gain knowledge or an advantage in the evaluation process, may result in disqualification of Proposer.

The top three to five advertising proposals and the top three to five public relations proposals will be asked to provide oral presentations at Rhode Island Commerce Corporation’s office in Providence, Rhode Island. After the oral presentations, there will be a question and answer period.

In addition to Proposer management, key personnel performing day-to-day activities will be requested to attend the interview.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

	Percentage
OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF COMPANY & DEMONSTRATED RESULTS Our evaluation will include an assessment of the history of your company, your experience as it relates to the requirements within this RFP, evidence of past performance, quality and relevance of past work, references, and related items.	15%
CREATIVITY	15%

Our evaluation will include an assessment of the quality of proposed strategies and creativity. This RFP does not request any new or proposed advertising creative specific to this project.	
FAMILIARITY WITH RHODE ISLAND & THE STATE’S TOURISM INDUSTRY Our evaluation will include our assessment of your understanding of the state tourism industry and how you integrated this knowledge into your proposal.	20%
QUALIFICATIONS OF PERSONNEL Our evaluation will include an assessment of the qualifications and experience of your managerial team, staff, subcontractors, and related items.	15%
PLANNING & INNOVATION Ability of firm to think beyond the now and set Rhode Island up to be at the forefront of the changing marketing landscape.	15%
STRATEGIC THINKING/PLANNING APPROACH Philosophy/approach to account planning, media planning and overall campaign development.	10%
BUDGET APPROACH/COST EFFECTIVENESS Effective and efficient delivery of quality services is demonstrated in relation to the budget allocation. The allocation is reasonable and appropriate. Approach to compensation structure is balanced and structured to maximize marketing investment.	10%
Total	100%

Proposal Requirements

In order to be considered responsive, proposals must at a minimum contain the following:

Technical Proposal Elements

1. Description of the proposed approach and work plan. Activities and timelines should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-oriented. Include a timeline of major tasks and milestones.
2. Person who will be the primary point of contact with the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation.
3. Qualifications of the respondent to provide the requested services including capability, capacity, similarly complex projects and related experience and client references. Certification of availability of individuals in proposal.
4. A listing of the staff to be assigned to this engagement and their respective qualifications, past experience on engagements of this scope including resumes, and their role in those past engagements.

5. Provide a description of the outcome monitoring and evaluation plan including a list of tools to track process, output and outcome measures for each component of the application.

Responses to this RFP are due **by December 12, 2016 by 2:00pm**. One (1) electronic (PDF) version and twenty (20) printed copies of each complete and separate proposal must be mailed or hand-delivered in a sealed envelope marked on the front as to whether it is a proposal designated as Public Relations or Advertising and addressed to:

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Attention: Tourism Public Relations and/or Advertising Agency(ies) RFP
315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101
Providence, RI 02908

Note: No phone calls and late responses will be accepted and responses received via electronic submission only will be disqualified.

Questions, interpretations, or clarifications concerning this RFP should be directed by e-mail to marketing@commerceri.com no later than 2:00pm on November 21, 2016. Responses to questions, interpretations, or clarifications concerning this RFP will be posted online via addendum at www.commerceri.com and www.purchasing.ri.gov by November 23, 2016 to ensure equal awareness of important facts and details.

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation reserves the right to terminate this solicitation prior to entering into any agreement with any qualified firm pursuant to this Request for Proposal, and by responding hereto, no firms are vested with any rights in any way whatsoever.

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for not complying with the terms of this RFP.