

State of Minnesota

Explore Minnesota Tourism



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Public Relations Services

SWIFT Event 2-11127

Date Posted: September 2, 2020

- Responses must be received not later than 2:00 p.m., Central Time, October 2, 2020
- Late responses will not be considered

Minnesota's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

The State of Minnesota is committed to diversity and inclusion in its public procurement process. The goal is to ensure that those providing goods and services to the State are representative of our Minnesota communities and include businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. Creating broader opportunities for historically under-represented groups provides for additional options and greater competition in the marketplace, creates stronger relationships and engagement within our communities, and fosters economic development and equality.

To further this commitment, the Department of Administration operates a program for Minnesota-based small businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. For additional information on this program, or to determine eligibility, please call 651-296-2600 or go to [the Office of Equity in Procurement home page, at www.mn.gov/admin/oep](http://www.mn.gov/admin/oep).

SPECIAL NOTICE: This is a request for proposal. It does not obligate the State of Minnesota to award a contract or complete the proposed program, and the State reserves the right to cancel this solicitation if it is considered in its best interest.

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Solicitation Attachments

- Attachment A: Responder Declarations
- Attachment B: Exceptions to State's Terms and Conditions
- Attachment C: Cost Detail
- Attachment D: Responder Forms
 - Veterans Preference Form
 - Workforce Certification
 - Equal Pay Certificate Form

Sample Contract

- Exhibit A: Contract Terms
- Exhibit B: Insurance Requirements
- Exhibit C: Specifications, Duties, and Scope of Work
- Exhibit D: Pricing

SECTION 1 – INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDERS

Steps for Completing Your Response	Follow the steps below to complete your response to this Solicitation: Step 1: Read the solicitation documents and ask questions, if any Step 2: Write your response Step 3: Submit your response
Incomplete Submittals	A response must be submitted along with any required additional documents. Incomplete responses that materially deviate from the required format and content may be rejected.

STEP 1 – READ THE SOLICITATION DOCUMENT & ASK QUESTIONS, IF ANY

How to Ask Questions	The contact person for questions is: Alyssa Hayes, Public Relations Officer Explore Minnesota Tourism Alyssa.Hayes@state.mn.us Questions should be emailed to the contact by 14 days prior to the RFP submission deadline with “PR SERVICES RFP” in the subject line. Other personnel are not authorized to answer questions regarding this Solicitation.
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STEP 2 – WRITE YOUR RESPONSE

The Proposal Content section is in Section 4. Prepare a written response and supply all requested content. Responses should address the requested information and documents detailed in Section 4. **DO NOT INCLUDE** Non-Public/Trade Secret data (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37).

Review, sign, and include the Responder Declarations with your response.

STEP 3 –SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSE

Where to Send Your Response	All responses to this solicitation (termed an “Event” within SWIFT) must be submitted through SWIFT using the Supplier portal (https://mn.gov/supplier). Training and documentation on how to submit your response is available through the Supplier portal link above. Fax, e-mail, and printed responses will not be accepted or considered. All costs incurred in responding to this solicitation will be borne by the responder. Late responses will not be considered. Responses received after End Date above will not be considered, even if errors or delays were caused by issues outside of responders’ control. If you need assistance please contact the SWIFT Vendor Assistance Helpline at 651-201-8100, Option 1, and then Option 1. By submitting a response, your company is making a binding legal offer for the period of time set forth below in Section 6, Conditions of Offer.
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SECTION 2 – SUMMARY OF SCOPE

1. Procurement Overview and Goals.

Project Overview:

Explore Minnesota Tourism (EMT), the state agency responsible for promoting Minnesota’s leisure travel opportunities to potential travelers, is requesting proposals from public relations agencies and contractors for ongoing consultation, strategy development, execution, and support in the area of media relations and communications.

Explore Minnesota Background:

As the state's tourism promotion office, Explore Minnesota pursues an entrepreneurial approach, leveraging the state's tourism investment with increased involvement by the private sector. Tourism is a \$16.0 billion industry in Minnesota, and a key sector of the state's economy. The leisure and hospitality industry employs nearly 273,000 workers, representing 11 percent of Minnesota's private sector employment. Leisure and hospitality also generates \$1.0 billion of the state's sales tax revenues. Minnesota welcomes more than 73 million domestic and international travelers annually.

Additional background information for this RFP can be found here:

- Exploreminnesota.com
- MN.gov/tourism-industry
- [Explore Minnesota media room](#)
- [Explore Minnesota Annual Report](#)
- [Minnesota Tourism Economic Impact Fact Sheet](#)

Project Goals:

- Aligning with the organization mission of Explore Minnesota, position Minnesota travel and tourism positively via national and regional media in order to promote and facilitate travel to and within Minnesota.
- Generate measurable media coverage of Explore Minnesota and unique statewide travel experiences.
- Develop and implement a robust media relations strategy that successfully promotes Minnesota tourism and Explore Minnesota.
- Augment existing social media and marketing strategies that promote Explore Minnesota, including use of popular statewide travel hashtag #OnlyinMN.
- Create collaborative strategies and tactics that encourage state tourism industry and partner participation.
- Provide leadership in areas of crisis communications, tourism stakeholder engagement, diversity and inclusion, and travel trade relations as needed.

2. Sample Tasks and Deliverables.

Account Services

- Provide a day-to-day point of contact for Explore Minnesota staff who is responsible for overall management of the account, including: contracts, budgets/billing, quality control, project coordination with client and agency team, presentation of opportunities, and leads overall strategy.
- Work collaboratively with designated Explore Minnesota PR staff, other department personnel and partner agencies; respond in timely manner to calls and emails; communicate progress and assist client as needed.
- Share added value opportunities beyond scope of work with client PR contact.

Strategic Planning

- Collaborate on annual and multi-year plans for publicizing Minnesota’s tourism products, services and resources via media relations; augment Minnesota’s overall travel marketing and branding campaign initiatives.

- Identify new opportunities, media trends, consumer interests, niche markets, proposal content, etc. to further plan objectives.

Media Relations

- National consumer media outreach to top-tier long and short lead media outlets, travel and other niche outlets.
- Regional consumer media outreach to long and short lead outlets in target markets: Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, and Nebraska.
- Tourism business and travel trade outreach as assigned.
- Editorial calendar development and outreach.
- Craft and distribute long and short lead pitches, monthly press releases, in addition to specified wire releases.
- Monitor targeted editorial calendar opportunities via PR industry services such as HARO, Profnet, Cision, etc.
- Promote press trip/media familiarization (FAM) tour opportunities as budget permits.
- Traditional media target identification.
- Build relationships with top-tier travel writers and social media influencers.
- Identify and recommend travel influencers and execute campaigns to raise awareness of Minnesota travel experiences via social media channels.
- Organize, plan and execute annual deskside media mission and/or media events as budget permits.
- Coordinate press conference, interviews, media appointments and presentations as needed.
- Support annual Governor’s tourism-related events as needed (e.g. Governor’s Fishing Opener)
- Plan and execute social media and consumer engagement tactics as assigned.
- Develop organizational talking points, fact sheets, and backgrounders as needed.

Monitoring and Reporting

- Outline activities and measurable results of activities.
- Domestic monitoring and reporting for agency-sourced media placements using appropriate measurement tools; print and online monitoring; broadcast TV monitoring and select radio (as available).
 - Prepare regular reports to exhibit estimated audience reach and total placements, as well as executive media report summary.

Crisis Communications

- Provide crisis management plan and ongoing crisis support as needed.
- Tasks shall include, but are not limited to, the identification and monitoring of domestic and international crisis situations that may impact Minnesota’s tourism industry and Explore Minnesota brand. Implementing integrated public relations plan, or evaluate effectiveness, cost efficiency, or desirability of ongoing public relations efforts.

SECTION 3 – PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. Anticipated Contract Term.

The term of this contract is anticipated to be from October 15, 2020 through October 14, 2021, with the option to extend up to an additional four years in increments determined by the State.

2. Question and Answer Instructions.

Prospective responders who have questions regarding this solicitation may contact:

Alyssa Hayes, Public Relations Officer
 Explore Minnesota Tourism
 Alyssa.Hayes@state.mn.us

All questions should be submitted no later than 14 days before the RFP submission deadline as listed in Section 1, Instructions to Responders. The State is not obligated to answer questions submitted after the question due date and time.

Questions and answers will be posted as needed in SWIFT as an Addendum to this solicitation on or after 7 days from the posting. Questions will be accepted up until 14 days prior to the submission deadline, and the remaining answers will be posted as soon as possible.

Only personnel listed above are authorized to discuss this solicitation with responders. Contact regarding this solicitation with any personnel not listed above could result in disqualification. This provision is not intended to prevent responders from seeking guidance from state procurement assistance programs regarding general procurement questions.

If a Responder discovers any significant ambiguity, error, conflict, discrepancy, omission, or other deficiency in the solicitation, please immediately notify the contact person detailed above in writing of such error and request modification or clarification of the document.

3. **Additional Tasks or Activities.**

Responders are encouraged to propose additional tasks, activities, or goods above and beyond the scope of what is requested in this solicitation if they will substantially improve the results of this procurement. Any costs associated with these additional tasks, activities, or goods should be clearly marked and separated from costs associated with the tasks, activities, or goods specifically requested under this solicitation. Because cost is a factor in the evaluation of responses to this solicitation, failure to separate costs for additional tasks, activities, or goods may result in those costs being included in a responder's cost proposal and result in a lower cost score for that proposal.

SECTION 4 – PROPOSAL CONTENT

The annual value of this contract is estimated at \$200,000.

Please submit the following information:

1. **Project Plan.** Responder must provide a detailed work plan for developing a plan for annual Minnesota travel public relations strategy specific to Explore Minnesota, including:
 - A statement of the objectives, goals, and tasks to show or demonstrate the responder's view and understanding of the nature of the contract.
 - A creative integrated public relations plan to convey the tone of the responder's approach to promoting Minnesota travel and tourism product and businesses.
 - Provide an example of promotional tactic that represents responder's creativity or ability to develop an innovative approach. Describe the goal, measurement, timeline, results, and any obstacles. Include budget levels and staff involvement. It is acknowledged that costs for some promotional initiatives may exceed the overall estimated contract budget. For the purpose of this proposal do not exceed the annual budget by more than \$50,000.
 - Identify media trends, consumer interests, target markets/media outlets.
 - Media pitch samples and one press release.
 - Proposed long-lead and short-lead annual editorial content calendar.
 - Demonstrate ways to integrate PR into other areas of Explore Minnesota content and marketing efforts.
 - Articulate your approach to crisis communication including a transitional strategy related to COVID-19 and civil unrest.
 - A sample executive media report summary and tracking spreadsheet, including average estimated audience reach for a similar contract of this capacity and tools used to report on media coverage.

- Proposals should illustrate an understanding of how to publicize a wide variety of consumer travel and travel trade story topics, representing statewide geographic diversity and the variety of business sectors within the tourism industry.
2. Qualifications and Experience.
 - Responder should provide an outline of background and experience with examples of similar work related to the travel and tourism industry.
 - Provide information regarding public relations experience with other government agencies.
 - Provide a list of personnel who will conduct the project, detailing their training, and work experience. Resumes or other information about project personnel should not, if possible, contain personal telephone numbers, home addresses, or home email addresses. If it is necessary to include personal contact information, please clearly indicate in the response that personal contact information is being provided.
 3. Portfolio. Describe your most successful accounts, identifying unique and important components. Provide 3-5 samples of work completed of a similar nature to this project (i.e. pitch example/themes, cases studies, proven media results, etc.). One sample must be related to crisis communication.
 4. Added-value. Responder may outline any proposed additional services they believe would improve the results of the project. Any such value-added services will be considered in the evaluation, but are not a requirement of the RFP.
 5. Cost Detail. Responder must complete and submit Attachment C, "Cost Detail," attached to this solicitation.
 6. Sample Transaction Documents. Prior to award, a potential successful Responder must submit samples of any transaction documents proposed for use under the resulting contract. The State of Minnesota will review the transaction documents to ensure they contain sufficient detail and to review additional terms and conditions contained therein, if any. The State reserves the right to request additional detail in the transaction documents or to reject additional terms and conditions within transaction documents. Once approved by the State, Contractor may not materially change transaction documents unless a change has been approved in writing by the Commissioner of Administration, as delegated to the Office of State Procurement. Any terms and conditions included in transaction documents but not approved by the State are voidable by the State. Any terms and conditions that are in conflict with Minnesota law or in conflict with the terms of the State Contract are void. Failure to void a non-approved term or condition included in a transaction document does not waive the State's right to void any non-approved term or condition.

Submit all requested documentation, including, but not limited to, the following documents:

1. Attachment A: Responder Declarations
2. Attachment B: Exceptions to State's Standard Terms and Conditions
3. Attachment C: Cost Proposal
4. Attachment D: Responder Forms
 - a. Veterans Preference Form
 - b. Workforce Certification
 - c. Equal Pay Certificate Form

DO NOT INCLUDE Non-Public/Trade Secret data (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37).

SECTION 5 – EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

The State will conduct an evaluation of responses to this Solicitation. The evaluations will be conducted in three phases:

- Phase 1 - Review responses for responsiveness and pass/fail requirements
- Phase 2 - Evaluate responses
- Phase 3 - Select finalist(s)

1. Phase 1 – Responsiveness and Pass/Fail Requirements

The purpose of this phase is to determine if each response complies with mandatory requirements. The State will first review each proposal for responsiveness to determine if the Responder satisfies all mandatory requirements. The State will evaluate these requirements on a pass/fail basis.

Mandatory Requirements. The following will be considered on a pass/fail basis:

- Responses must be received by the due date and time specified in this RFP.
- Responses must include a completed written/technical proposal.
- Responses must include completed and separate cost detail.

2. Phase 2 - Evaluate Responses

A review committee of Explore Minnesota management and PR staff will evaluate all written proposals received by the deadline. Scores will be based on the criteria and weighting below.

Only those responses found to have met Phase 1 criteria will be considered in Phase 2.

The factors and weighting on which responses will be evaluated are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Project Plan for Deliverables | 525 points |
| 2. Qualifications and Experience | 75 points |
| 3. Portfolio | 100 points |
| 4. Cost Detail (separate from technical proposal) | <u>300 points</u>
1000 points |
| 5. Preference Points (if applicable) | 60 points (in addition to 1,000 available) |

Preference points are described under Solicitation Terms and will be applied to the total score after points have been awarded.

3. Phase 3 - Select Finalist(s)

Only those responses that have been evaluated under Phase 2 shall be eligible for Phase 3.

The State will make its selection based on best value, as determined by this evaluation process. The State reserves the right to pursue negotiations on any exception taken to the State's standard terms and conditions. In the event that negotiated terms cannot be reached, the State reserves the right to terminate negotiations and begin negotiating with the next highest scoring responder or take other actions as the State deems appropriate. If the State anticipates multiple awards, the State reserves the right to negotiate with more than one Responder.

It is anticipated that the evaluation and selection will be completed by October 9, 2020.

SECTION 6 – SOLICITATION TERMS

1. **Competition in Responding**

The State desires open and fair competition. Questions from responders regarding any of the requirements of the Solicitation must be submitted in writing to the Solicitation Administrator listed in the Solicitation before the due date and time. If changes are made the State will issue an addendum.

Any evidence of collusion among responders in any form designed to defeat competitive responses will be reported to the Minnesota Attorney General for investigation and appropriate action.

2. **Addenda to the Solicitation**

Changes to the Solicitation will be made by addendum with notification and posted in the same manner as the original Solicitation. Any addenda issued will become part of the Solicitation.

3. **Data Security - Foreign Outsourcing of Work is Prohibited**

All storage and processing of information shall be performed within the borders of the United States. This provision also applies to work performed by subcontractors at all levels.

4. **Joint Ventures**

The State allows joint ventures among groups of responders when responding to the solicitation. However, one responder must submit a response on behalf of all the others in the group. The responder that submits the response will be considered legally responsible for the response (and the contract, if awarded).

5. **Withdrawing Response**

A responder may withdraw its response prior to the due date and time of the Solicitation. For solicitations in the SWIFT Supplier Portal, a responder may withdraw its response from the SWIFT Supplier Portal. For solicitations done any other way, a responder may withdraw its response by notifying the Solicitation Administrator in writing of the desire to withdraw.

After the due date and time of this Solicitation, a responder may withdraw a response only upon showing that an obvious error exists in the response. The showing and request for withdrawal must be made in writing to Solicitation Administrator within a reasonable time and prior to the State's detrimental reliance on the response.

6. **Rights Reserved**

The State reserves the right to:

- Reject any and all responses received;
- Waive or modify any informalities, irregularities, or inconsistencies in the responses received;
- Negotiate with the highest scoring Responder[s];
- Terminate negotiations and select the next response providing the best value for the State;
- Consider documented past performance resulting from a State contract may be considered in the evaluation process;
- Short list the highest scoring Responders;
- Require Responders to conduct presentations, demonstrations, or submit samples;
- Interview key personnel or references;
- Request a best and final offer from one or more Responders;
- The State reserves the right to request additional information; and
- The State reserves the right to use estimated usage or scenarios for the purpose of conducting pricing evaluations. The State reserves the right to modify scenarios, and to request or add additional scenarios for the evaluation.

7. Samples and Demonstrations

Upon request, Responders are to provide samples to the State at no charge. Except for those destroyed or mutilated in testing, the State will return samples if requested and at the Responder's expense. All costs to conduct and associated with a demonstration will be the sole responsibility of the Responder.

8. Responses are Nonpublic during Evaluation Process

All materials submitted in response to this Solicitation will become property of the State. During the evaluation process, all information concerning the responses submitted will remain private or nonpublic and will not be disclosed to anyone whose official duties do not require such knowledge. Responses are private or nonpublic data until the completion of the evaluation process as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.591. The completion of the evaluation process is defined as the State having completed negotiating a contract with the selected responder. The State will notify all responders in writing of the evaluation results.

9. Trade Secret Information

9.1 Responders must not submit as part of their response trade secret material, as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37.

9.2 In the event trade secret data are submitted, Responder must defend any action seeking release of data it believes to be trade secret, and indemnify and hold harmless the State, its agents and employees, from any judgments awarded against the State in favor of the party requesting the data, and any and all costs connected with that defense.

9.3 The State does not consider cost or prices to be trade secret material, as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37.

9.4 A responder may present and discuss trade secret information during an interview or demonstration with the State, if applicable.

10. Conditions of Offer

Unless otherwise approved in writing by the State, Responder's cost proposal and all terms offered in its response that pertain to the completion of professional and technical services and general services will remain firm for 180 days, until they are accepted or rejected by the State, or they are changed by further negotiations with the State prior to contract execution.

11. Award

Any award that may result from this solicitation will be based upon the total accumulated points as established in the solicitation. The State reserves the right to award this solicitation to a single Responder, or to multiple Responders, whichever is in the best interest of the State, providing each Responder is in compliance with all terms and conditions of the solicitation. The State reserves the right to accept all or part of an offer, to reject all offers, to cancel the solicitation, or to re-issue the solicitation, whichever is in the best interest of the State.

12. Requirements Prior to Contract Execution

Prior to contract execution, a responder receiving a contract award must comply with any submittal requests. A submittal request may include, but is not limited to, a Certificate of Insurance.

13. Targeted Group, Economically Disadvantaged Business, Veteran-Owned and Individual Preference

Unless a greater preference is applicable and allowed by law, in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 16C.16, businesses that are eligible and certified by the State as targeted group (TG) businesses, economically disadvantaged (ED) businesses, and veteran-owned businesses will receive points equal to 6% percent of the total points available as preference.

For TG/ED/VO certification and eligibility information visit [the Office of Equity in Procurement website at https://mn.gov/admin/business/vendor-info/oep/](https://mn.gov/admin/business/vendor-info/oep/) or call the Division's Helpline at 651.296.2600.

14. Reciprocity

State shall comply with Minn. Stat. § 16C.06, subd. 7, as that applies to a non-resident vendor. This paragraph does not apply for any project in which federal funds are expended.