

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**PROJECT NAME:** Heart of Canada Touring Route

**DATE ISSUED:** May 20th, 2026

**NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**RFP CLOSING DATE/TIME:** June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**CONTACT PERSON:** Sara Currier, Manager of Marketing and Communications  
[s.currier@destinationnorthernontario.ca](mailto:s.currier@destinationnorthernontario.ca)

**BIDDER INFORMATION**

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BUSINESS NAME

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MAILING ADDRESS

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CITY

POSTAL CODE

( )

( )

TELEPHONE

FAX

( )

CELLULAR

EMAIL ADDRESS

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SIGNATURE

NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED PERSON

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DATE

HST REGISTRATION NUMBER

## Intention to Submit Proposal/Questions

To ensure the Bidder is apprised of any additional information as may be provided, please complete Page 1 and submit [info@destinationnorthernontario.ca](mailto:info@destinationnorthernontario.ca). Written questions (only) may be submitted to the email address above. One consolidated response to all questions (without attribution) received prior to the deadline specified above will be published to all proponents who have declared their intent to submit a proposal.

### A. Project Overview

The Heart of Canada Touring Route is a 1,500-kilometre, figure-8 touring route spanning Northwestern Ontario and Manitoba. The route highlights diverse communities, landscapes, and visitor experiences and is supported by regional and municipal tourism partners.

The Heart of Canada Steering Committee is seeking a qualified proponent to plan, manage, and coordinate a comprehensive, partnership-driven marketing campaign for the 2026-27 tourism season.

The purpose of this RFP is to identify a proponent to develop and implement a marketing and coordination approach that:

1. Increases awareness of the Heart of Canada Touring Route through targeted, multi-channel marketing initiatives.
2. Drives visitation from priority markets to participating communities.
3. Strengthens and manages partnerships with participating municipalities and tourism organizations, including coordination of shared funding contributions and Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) allocations.
4. Supports the implementation and promotion of Tourism-Oriented Directional (TOD) signage as part of an integrated marketing and wayfinding strategy.

### B. Administrative Information

#### 1. Definitions

This section defines the key terms used throughout the RFP document.

- The term “Bidder” is defined as “an individual or a company that submits or intends to submit a proposal in response to this Request for Proposal”.
- The successful Bidder will be referred to as “the Consultant(s)”.
- This Request for Proposal will hereinafter be referred to as an “RFP”.
- The words “shall” or “will” are used to indicate a mandatory requirement.
- The word “should” is used to indicate an optional requirement.

## **2. The Process**

### **Closing Date, Time and Location**

Each Bidder must deliver his/her proposal electronically. Proposals must be received before **4:00 p.m.** local time in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario on **June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026** (the “Closing Time”) to [info@destinationnorthernontario.ca](mailto:info@destinationnorthernontario.ca).

### **Late Proposals**

It is the responsibility of each Bidder to ensure that his/her proposal is received at the Closing Location before the Closing Time and the Bidder assumes the entire risk of failure of DNO to receive its proposal at the Closing Location before the Closing Time. Proposals received at the Closing Location after the Closing Time will not be considered and may be returned to the Bidder unopened.

### **Schedule and Timing of Project**

It is expected that the RFP process will take place during the 2026-27 fiscal year.

### **Conflict of Interest**

DNO reserves the right to disqualify any submission due to a conflict of interest. Each applicant must disclose any actual or potential conflict that may be occurring at time of bid or may occur during the course of the project. If a vendor fails to disclose an actual or potential conflict or where such a conflict cannot be resolved, DNO has the right to terminate the contract. Any contract awarded as a result of this RFP will be non-exclusive. DNO may at its sole discretion purchase the same or similar services from other sources during the term of the contract.

### **Evaluation and Selection**

A committee formed by DNO will perform evaluation of Proposals. Proposals will first be checked against mandatory criteria. Proposals not meeting the mandatory criteria will be rejected without further consideration. Proposals that do meet the mandatory criteria will then be assessed against additional criteria. DNO’s intent is to enter into a Contract with the Bidder who has the highest overall ranking. Destination Northern Ontario will notify all bidders of the result of their evaluation however there will be no formal debrief or sharing of detailed evaluations with bidders.

### **Negotiation Delay**

If a Contract cannot be negotiated with the highest-ranking Bidder within a period of time satisfactory to DNO, DNO may, at its sole discretion, terminate negotiations with that Bidder and either negotiate a Contract with another Bidder or choose to terminate this RFP process and not enter into a Contract with any of the Bidders. DNO may also at its sole discretion, send out a new RFP for this project should it be unable to negotiate a Contract with the successful Bidder or another Bidder.

### **3. Proposal Preparation**

#### **Signed Proposals**

The Bidder must ensure that his/her submission includes the Cover Page of this RFP, signed by a person authorized to sign on behalf of the Bidder and to bind the Bidder to his/her Proposal and the terms of this RFP.

#### **Irrevocability and Validity of Proposals**

By submission of a clear and detailed written notice, the Bidder may amend or withdraw his/her proposal prior to Closing Time. After Closing Time, all Proposals become irrevocable and will remain open for acceptance for a period of ninety days from Closing Time. By submission of a Proposal, the Bidder agrees that, should the Proposal be successful, the Bidder will enter into a contract with DNO.

#### **Bidders' Expenses**

Bidders are solely responsible for their own expenses in preparing a Proposal and for subsequent negotiations, if any. DNO will not be liable to any Bidder whether DNO accepts a Proposal or rejects all Proposals, for any claims, whether for costs or damages incurred by the Bidder in preparing the Proposal, loss of anticipated profit in connection with the Contract or any other matter whatsoever.

Any Bidder may be required to meet in person or by telephone with the DNO Selection Committee to explain details of the proposal and the Bidder will be responsible for all costs of his/her attendance and the attendance of any of his/her representatives.

#### **Liability for Errors**

While DNO has taken considerable care to ensure an accurate representation of information in the RFP, the information contained in the RFP is supplied solely as a guideline for Bidders. The information is not guaranteed or warranted accurate, nor is it necessarily comprehensive or exhaustive. Nothing in this RFP is intended to relieve Bidders from forming their own opinions and conclusions with respect to the matters addressed in this RFP.

#### **Firm Pricing**

Prices will be firm for the entire Contract period unless specifically stated otherwise.

#### **Sub-contracting**

Using a sub-contractor (who must be clearly identified in the proposal) is acceptable. This includes a joint submission by two or more Bidders having no formal corporate links. However, in this case, one of these Bidders

must be prepared to take overall responsibility for successful performance of the Contract and this should be clearly identified in the proposal.

#### **4. Additional Terms and Conditions**

##### **Acceptance and Rejection of Proposals**

This RFP should not be construed as an agreement to purchase goods or services. The lowest priced or any Proposal will not necessarily be accepted and DNO is not bound to enter into a Contract with any Bidder.

##### **Right to Amend or Cancel**

DNO reserves the right in its sole discretion at any time, and for whatever reason to, by addendum, modify, amend, or otherwise change this RFP. It is envisioned the initial contract period would be a year with renewal contracts up to five years.

##### **Contract**

Notice in writing to a Bidder that he/she has been identified as the successful Bidder and the subsequent full execution of a written Contract will constitute a Contract for the goods or services, and no Bidder will acquire any legal or equitable rights or privileges relative to the goods or services until the occurrence of both events.

##### **No Public Announcements**

Bidders will not make any public announcement or have any communication with the media in connection with this RFP without the prior written consent of DNO.

##### **No Promotion of Relationship**

Bidders will not disclose their relationship with DNO for promotional purposes, including by means of verbal declarations and announcements through any medium whatsoever.

##### **Proprietary Information Notice**

This RFP contains proprietary and confidential information of DNO, which is provided for the sole purpose of permitting the Bidder to respond to this RFP. In consideration of the receipt of this RFP, the Bidder agrees to maintain such information in confidence and not to reproduce or otherwise distribute this information.

##### **Assignment of Intellectual Rights**

All work carried out as a result of this RFP will be the exclusive property of DNO and will be surrendered to DNO

immediately upon completion, expiration, or cancellation of the project. DNO will own all rights, title, and interest in all intellectual property rights, including copyrights, patents, trade secrets and trademarks in any work created that is paid for by DNO.

### **Francophone Requirement**

Submissions will detail how francophone stakeholders and/or consumers will be served.

### **C. Proposal Content and Format**

The following format and sequence should be followed in order to provide consistency in Bidders' responses and to ensure that each Proposal receives full consideration. Proposals must be formatted for American standard letter size paper, and all pages should be consecutively numbered.

- Title page: include title of RFP, Bidder's name, contact person, address, telephone number and E-mail address
- Signed RFP Cover Page
- Table of Contents: use page numbers
- Executive Summary: Briefly describe the key features of the proposed solution (2 pages maximum)
- Corporate Profile: Include a profile of the corporate history including the length of time in business, number of employees, organizational structure (2 pages maximum)
- Corporate Experience: Describe projects of a similar size and nature for which the Bidder has provided similar goods or services. Three examples of prior work and/or live website links must accompany the Bidder proposal. If possible, include contact of clients. This should include experience of integrating an LMS or similar system and how that system was designed and maintained over time. If experience in maintaining a bilingual site applies, please describe.
- Project Understanding (maximum 6 pages): demonstrates understanding of the following (please use these headings in the Bidder's proposal):
  - Project Deliverables
  - Scope of Work
  - Description of How Requirements Will be Met
- Project management: please provide a back schedule with an assumed project kick-off date of June 2026. The schedule should identify:
  - Key project components, such as:
    - Client meetings / project kick-off and ongoing coordination
    - Development of an integrated marketing plan to increase awareness and visitation to the Heart of Canada Touring Route across priority markets
    - Delivery of a multi-channel marketing campaign, including social media, digital advertising, video, and editorial content highlighting key destinations and

- experiences along the route
    - Partnership coordination and management with municipalities, tourism organizations, and regional partners, including funding coordination and joint marketing activities
    - Planning and coordination support for Tourism-Oriented Directional (TOD) signage as part of an integrated wayfinding and destination marketing approach
    - Ongoing performance tracking, monthly reporting, and a final evaluation of campaign outcomes and effectiveness
  - The schedule should identify the expected duration and total work effort required for each component, as well as planned resources identified
  - The workback schedule should also indicate expected client review and approval steps
- Pricing: **\$26,000.00**
  - Submissions must not include appendices (unless otherwise stated).
  - File size must not exceed 16 mbs, and files are to be submitted in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format.

#### **D. Detailed Project Information**

##### **1. Summary and Objectives**

The Heart of Canada Touring Route is a 1,500-kilometre, figure-8 touring route spanning Northwestern Ontario and Manitoba. The route highlights diverse communities, landscapes, and visitor experiences and is supported by regional and municipal tourism partners.

The Heart of Canada Steering Committee is seeking a qualified proponent to plan, manage, and coordinate a comprehensive, partnership-driven marketing campaign for the 2026-27 tourism season.

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##### **2. Scope of Work**

The selected proponent will work in collaboration with the Heart of Canada Steering Committee and will be responsible for the following:

a) Marketing Strategy Development

- Develop a comprehensive, budget-aligned marketing strategy for the Heart of Canada Touring Route
- Identify priority markets, messaging, and promotional tactics
- Ensure alignment with regional tourism objectives and partner interests

b) Digital Media Campaign

- Develop and implement a content strategy highlighting key attractions, experiences, and itineraries along the route
- Create and distribute content across digital platforms, including:
  - Social media (Facebook and Instagram)
  - Blog posts and articles
  - Video content showcasing route highlights
- Implement targeted paid advertising on social media and search engines
- Review and enhance the existing Heart of Canada content page and trip planner itinerary

d) Partnership Coordination

- Coordinate a tiered partnership investment model with participating partners and Destination Northern Ontario
- Support partner activation, recognition, and participation throughout the campaign
- Maintain clear communication with partners about deliverables, timelines, and Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) contributions
- Source funding options for the sustainability of the CTOD signage

e) Reporting and Coordination

- Provide monthly performance updates and analytics
- Participate in a monthly meeting with the Heart of Canada Steering Committee
- Deliver a final campaign evaluation and performance report

**Budget: \$26,000.00**

Develop a tiered partnership approach with the following stakeholders:

1. Small Communities (3): Dryden, Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls and Kenora
2. Large Urban Centre (1): Thunder Bay
3. Regional Tourism Organization: Destination Northern Ontario

**E. Management Requirements**

Bidders are required to submit a work plan, itemizing the tasks and sub-tasks they will undertake to complete the project. The work plan should be thorough enough in scope and detail to convey the Bidder's understanding of the project requirements and his/her ability to manage the project. Major meetings and all deliverables should be included, and each task should show the start and end date as well as the estimated number of hours or days

required to complete the task. Each task should also identify the person or persons assigned to complete the task. In addition, each person's level of effort (time) and required resources should be established.

## F. Pricing

The bidder shall provide cost detail for **each phase** and **each component** and **key tasks** set out in this RFP and the proposal must include the following components:

- Professional fees in per diem rates
- Travel Expenses including accommodation
- Administrative/Miscellaneous fees
- Maintenance Fees
- Total fees/expenses
- Reports in Microsoft Word
- HST
- Other disbursements

Bidders are required to provide their payment terms as part of their proposal.

## G. Proposal Evaluation

Evaluation of proposals will be performed by the project steering committee. Selection of the Consultant will be achieved through a formal evaluation process. Proposals will first be checked against mandatory criteria. Proposals not meeting the mandatory criteria will be rejected without further consideration. Proposals that do meet the mandatory criteria will then be assessed against the additional criteria listed below or in any addendum or addendum related to this RFP. Additional consideration will be given to proposals that demonstrate a high level of professionalism, innovation and perceived commitment to the project.

The following are the mandatory requirements for submitting:

- Bidder must email, fax, mail or deliver a signed copy of the Bidder Information Form (page one) to the "closing location" by the "closing time".
- The RFP must be accompanied by a cover letter/email certifying the accuracy of all information contained in the submission and acknowledging the Bidder offer of services according to the terms of reference set out in **Section 1** and the terms and conditions set out in **Section D**. Please cite each aspect in framing responses and provide clear and concise responses.
- The proposal will be evaluated on the content. Repeating wording from the RFP will not constitute a

response. Rather, the Bidder should explain the steps that will be taken to achieve the goal of the RFP.

- An electronic version of the Proposal must be received at the “closing location” by the “closing time”.
- The Proposal must not be mailed, delivered or sent by facsimile.
- The Proposal must contain a cover letter; and
- Size of the file should not exceed 6 MB.

### Aspects to be Addressed

- a) Provide a brief overview of the Bidder company including legal name, address and URL. Identify the representative authorized to negotiate on behalf of the Bidder company. Include full contact information. Provide brief biography and overview of the relevant experience of this person. As an appendix, include a full resume.
- b) Provide a brief biography of the Bidder company including years in business and describe its ownership and management structure along with areas of specialty.
- c) Identify the project lead and key team members. Outline their roles and responsibilities and provide brief biographies.
- d) Provide a minimum of three references from individuals that can speak directly to the references and able to speak to their experience with proposed project personnel. Include name, title, organization and full contact information.
- e) Describe the Bidder relevant experience and expertise with assignments of a similar nature. Highlight experience within the tourism/hospitality sector.
- f) With reference to Section B. (2), identify any past or current relationships the Bidder may have had or have with organization(s) involved in this project and/or located within the RTO 13 region.
- g) Outline the Bidder proposed approach to delivery referencing the requirements set out in section D. (1) and (2). If the Bidder recommends an alternative approach/critical path, articulate the rationale and envisioned benefits of this approach. Specify any assumptions.
- h) Provide proposed work plan to support the Bidder response to identify tactics, resource requirements, milestones and deliverables. Specify any assumptions.
- i) Provide a minimum of three (3) quotes to support the Bidder response to g) and h). Clearly document the Bidder quotation basis and provide a cost breakdown by phase/key task. Specify applicable hourly/daily rate and any assumptions.
- j) Describe what the Bidder sees as the key success factors in the formulation of the key deliverables of this initiative and the principal obstacles or challenges that the Bidder foresees in the execution of this project. Include how the Bidder would mitigate these.
- k) Provide any additional information that the Bidder believe will be helpful in assessing the Bidder capabilities.

Criteria will be scored as follows:

Criterion	Weight
Credentials, professional knowledge, expertise	30%
Demonstrated experience and ability to meet requirements as evidenced in proposal responses and work samples	35%
Demonstrated qualifications and expertise as supported by quality of client references	20%
Competitiveness of proposed fees and thoroughness of proposal	15%

### **Bidder Qualifications and References (total 30 points)**

#### 1. Corporate and Project Team’s Experience and Qualifications – 20 points

- a) The proposal must identify all members of the proposal team (including subcontractors if applicable) and their relevant skills, qualifications and experience, the amount of time each team member will devote to the project, roles/responsibilities and team structure.
- b) Knowledge of Northern Ontario’s tourism industry and the marketing of Northern Ontario must be demonstrated. Knowledge of Learning Management Systems, Virtual training environments and online learning platforms must be demonstrated.
- c) The proposal should provide evidence of the Bidder’s recent (in the last 3 years) experience and demonstrate the team’s experience in working together in similar projects.
- d) The proposal should provide experience, if any, of working with bilingual site development and ongoing maintenance.

#### 2. Northern Ontario - 10 points

Preference will be given to Bidders who operate in Northern Ontario or have a partnership with a Northern Ontario consultant who will participate significantly in the implementation of the contract.

### **Management Description (total 55 points)**

#### 3. Approach to the Project and its Deliverables – 30 points

- a) The proposal should demonstrate the Bidder’s clear understanding of the project by recommending a suitable and innovative approach to the project. The approach must be practical, realistic and clearly

articulate how it will achieve the objectives of this RFP.

b) The proposal should also present evidence of the Bidder's comprehension of the project scope of work and rationale, including the Tourism Excellence North program. Value-added insight that is beyond what is stated in the RFP will be recognized; simple reiteration of the content of the RFP will not constitute the Bidder's understanding of the project.

#### 4. Quality of Project Management – 20 points

a) Bidders are expected to describe the proposed approach to overall project management and client liaison and reporting, including a detailed work plan with timing of milestones/deliverables including separate workplans for the Tourism Excellence North site and the Northern Portal.

b) In addition, Bidders should be able to demonstrate a successful track record of delivering similar projects on schedule and within budget. Examples of prior work that is similar in scope is a requirement.

#### 5. Document Quality – 5 points

a) As it is considered to be precursor of the quality of the final product, written proposals will be assessed in terms of overall quality, i.e., organization, presentation/appearance, clarity and conciseness.

b) Bidders may, if they wish, provide samples of additional relevant work that may be of interest to the proponent.

#### **Pricing (total 15 points)**

#### 6. Pricing – 15 points

Proposals within budget will be evaluated based on the cost breakdown in phases. The budget must provide detailed costs for each of the deliverables and milestones including professional fees, disbursements, the preparation costs for reports, HST as applicable and other related costs. All costs must be reasonable, and total budgets will be factored into the final consideration.

#### **H. Follow-up work and related Projects**

Based on DNO's satisfaction with outcomes, an annual review and receipt of a proposal for the next fiscal period, acceptable to DNO, there will be an opportunity to engage the successful bidder for future terms. This engagement would again be based on the above and a negotiated annual contract for the fiscal period identified.