

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

PROJECT NAME - ELEVATING NORTHERN ONTARIO: DESTINATION & ORGANIZATIONAL BRAND REFRESH

DATE ISSUED: June 29th, 2026

NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID: July 7th, 2026

RFP CLOSING DATE/TIME: July 21st, 2026

FINALIST BIDDER INTERVIEWS: July 23rd, 2026

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Currier, Manager of Marketing and Communications
s.currier@destinationnorthernontario.ca

BIDDER INFORMATION

BUSINESS NAME

MAILING ADDRESS

CITY POSTAL CODE

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TELEPHONE FAX

()

CELLULAR EMAIL ADDRESS

SIGNATURE NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED PERSON

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. **Questions are also due by the Notice of Intent to Bid date on Page 1.**

A. Project Overview

Destination Northern Ontario (RTO 13) seeks a qualified agency to lead a **comprehensive brand development initiative for the Northern Ontario region, alongside a brand refinement for the Destination Northern Ontario organization.**

This initiative will encompass two complementary goals:

1. **Destination Brand** – Redefine Northern Ontario’s identity as a vibrant, diverse, and authentic destination. The brand should celebrate the region’s natural beauty, unique experiences, local culture, and community spirit, resonating with visitors, residents, and partners alike. It should articulate Northern Ontario’s distinctive character and create a compelling vision for its future as a tourist destination.

This brand must align with Destination Ontario and Destination Canada to ensure consistency, credibility, and cohesion across provincial and national tourism messaging. The intended primary application of this branding is for use on **northernontario.travel** and other consumer-facing industry initiatives, where it will serve as a unifying and adaptable identity system to support tourism promotion, marketing campaigns, and partner engagement across Northern Ontario.

2. **Corporate Brand** – Refine and strengthen Destination Northern Ontario’s organizational brand through messaging, positioning, and expression, while maintaining the existing name, logo, and visual identity system.

This rebranding initiative aims to create a cohesive and authentic brand ecosystem that inspires pride in residents, energizes tourism partners, drives visitation, and strengthens Northern Ontario’s visibility and reputation nationally and globally.

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 **July 21st, 2026** (the “Closing Time”) to 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 prior to August 2026.

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.

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
- Corporate Profile: Include a profile of the corporate history including the length of time in business, number of employees, organizational structure
- 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.
- Project Understanding: demonstrates understanding of the following (please use these headings in the Bidder's proposal):
 - Project Deliverables and Scope of Work
 - Description of How Requirements Will be Met
- Project management: please provide a work back schedule with an assumed project kick-off date of July 2026.
 - 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: \$50,000.00 CAD**
- Files are to be submitted in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format.

D. Detailed Project Information

1. Summary and Objectives

Project Overview

Destination Northern Ontario (RTO 13) seeks a qualified agency to lead a comprehensive brand refresh for both the Northern Ontario region and the Destination Northern Ontario organization. The initiative will build on the existing brand and toolkit, ensuring a cohesive, authentic, and forward-looking identity that reflects the unique character, culture, and experiences of Northern Ontario while reinforcing the organization's leadership, mission, and values.

This initiative encompasses two complementary components:

- **Destination Brand:** Position Northern Ontario as a vibrant, diverse, and authentic tourism destination that inspires pride among residents, resonates with visitors, and strengthens national and global visibility. The destination brand must align with the broader strategic frameworks and visual identity systems of Destination Ontario and Destination Canada to ensure consistency across provincial and national tourism marketing ecosystems. Its intended primary application is for northernontario.travel and other consumer-facing industry initiatives.
- **Corporate Brand:** Refresh Destination Northern Ontario's organizational identity by strengthening its messaging, tone, and positioning to better reflect its leadership in destination marketing, stewardship, and industry collaboration, enhancing trust and connection with partners and stakeholders, without making changes to the existing visual brand elements.

Project Objectives

1. Develop a clear, compelling, and authentic brand identity for Northern Ontario that captures the region's culture, experiences, and natural beauty.
2. Refine and strengthen Destination Northern Ontario's corporate brand to better articulate its mission, values, and organizational culture through improved messaging and positioning, while maintaining the existing visual identity.
3. Ensure alignment between destination, corporate, Destination Ontario, and Destination Canada brand frameworks to support cohesive national-to-regional storytelling.
4. Ensure alignment between destination and corporate brand.
5. Engage stakeholders and communities throughout the process to ensure the brand reflects lived experiences, aspirations, and the unique character of Northern Ontario.
6. Deliver practical tools and recommendations to support long-term implementation.

This initiative will strengthen Northern Ontario's reputation as a premier destination, elevate the profile of Destination Northern Ontario, and create a unified brand ecosystem that inspires, engages, and drives meaningful results.

Scope of Work

The project will proceed through the following phases:

Phase 1: Research & Discovery

- Conduct a review of Northern Ontario’s current destination positioning, market perception, and competitive landscape.
- Assess Destination Northern Ontario’s corporate brand, stakeholder perceptions, and communications.
- Engage key stakeholders including Destination Ontario’s Northern Office, community representatives, tourism operators, Indigenous partners, residents, and industry partners through interviews and surveys.
- Compile and analyze secondary research, including tourism data, visitor trends, and relevant market insights.
- Attend Destination Northern Ontario board meetings as required to provide updates, gather feedback, and ensure alignment with leadership priorities.
- Leverage the existing brand toolkit to identify opportunities for refinement and ensure consistency.
- Ensure all research and insights consider alignment opportunities with Destination Ontario and Destination Canada brand positioning, messaging frameworks, and tourism marketing priorities

Phase 2: Brand Strategy Development

- Refine Destination Northern Ontario’s corporate messaging, tone, and positioning while maintaining the existing visual identity.
- Develop a comprehensive destination messaging framework tailored to residents, visitors, and industry partners.
- Align destination and corporate brand narratives to ensure consistency across all touchpoints.
- Provide recommendations related to brand architecture, communications, and key audience engagement strategies.
- Ensure destination brand strategy aligns with Destination Ontario and Destination Canada strategic brand frameworks to maintain national consistency and market competitiveness.

Phase 3: Creative Concepting & Design (in collaboration with Visual Communications Designer)

- Develop creative concepts that express the destination brand.
- Apply existing visual identity elements (including current logos, typography, and colour palettes) to ensure consistent use across all platforms.
- Create templates, style guides, and marketing toolkits for various channels, in close coordination with the internal Visual Communications Designer.
- Integrate insights from the existing brand toolkit to maintain continuity, strengthen brand equity, and support cohesive implementation across all touchpoints.
- Ensure creative outputs are adaptable for use across the northernontario.travel portal and other consumer-facing industry initiatives and digital channels.

Phase 4: Implementation Planning & Rollout

- Provide actionable recommendations for a phased rollout of both destination and corporate brands.
- Identify opportunities for stakeholder engagement and activation to build awareness and adoption.

Phase 5: Project Management & Collaboration

- Maintain ongoing communication with Destination Northern Ontario.
- Conduct regular status updates, review sessions, and approvals throughout the project.
- Ensure project milestones, timelines, and budgets are met efficiently.
- Collaborate consistently with the internal Visual Communications Designer to maintain brand cohesion and quality.

All deliverables, including strategy, messaging, creative outputs, and toolkits, must be provided in both English and French.

This work is intended to inform and support future implementation activities and related initiatives identified within this RFP.

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 or mail or 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 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. Ability to develop and implement marketing campaigns.
- 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.

e) Ability to develop, implement, and evaluate integrated marketing campaigns and strategic marketing initiatives that support tourism growth, visitor engagement, and destination awareness.

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. 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.

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.

In addition, successful performance under this engagement may lead to opportunities to participate in future related projects, initiatives, or additional work undertaken by DNO, subject to DNO's requirements, procurement policies, and mutual agreement. This work will also support future implementation and related activities identified through the outcomes of this RFP.