

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

PROJECT NAME

DATE ISSUED: AUGUST 16 2024

NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID: AUGUST 23 2024

RFP CLOSING DATE/TIME: AUGUST 30 2024

FINALIST BIDDER INTERVIEWS: SEPTEMBER 12 2024

CONTACT PERSON: Stephanie Hopkin, Senior Coordinator, Marketing and Communications
s.hopkin@destinationnorthernontario.ca

BIDDER INFORMATION

BUSINESS NAME

MAILING ADDRESS

CITY

POSTAL CODE

()

()

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. 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

In 2014, Destination Northern Ontario (DNO), then known as Tourism Northern Ontario, initiated a comprehensive research project to analyze the priority products offered by the Northern Ontario tourism industry. This research focused on various key segments, including nature-based tourists, anglers, festival & event tourists, hunters, attraction tourists, motorcycle tourists, VFR (visiting friends and relatives) tourists, snowmobile tourists, and major urban tourists. The findings significantly influenced product development and marketing strategies over the subsequent years.

Since the completion of this research in 2015, no substantial product or segment-specific research has been conducted at the regional level. Northern Ontario's unique geography and diverse product offerings attract both domestic and international visitors, with significant traffic from Ontario, particularly the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased domestic visitation, creating an opportunity to build repeat domestic tourism.

To capitalize on these opportunities, DNO aims to commission a new large-scale research and analysis project. This project will focus on emerging travel trends, best-bet markets, sunseting travel segments, priority products and experiences, and consumer expectations. The research will cover the following key areas:

- New Travel Segments and Trends: Analysis of travel trends specific to Northern Ontario's geography, including the sub-regions of Northwest (13C), Algoma (13B), and Northeastern Ontario (13A).
- Priority Products: Identification of products categorized as "Inspire and Grow" (products with high growth potential) or "Defend and Maintain" (well-established products needing market share protection).
- Segment Profiles: Detailed profiles for key market segments, including Generation Z, Millennials, Baby Boomers, and Generation Y.
- Best-bet markets: identification of best-bet markets for products and experiences as they relate to northern Ontario tourism.
- Travel Intentions: Research on income levels, travel distance, trip length and cost, consumer planning journey, media outlets, and reasons for travel (VFR, Leisure/Pleasure, Business).
- Shoulder Season Travel: Exploration of travel opportunities during the shoulder seasons.
- Booking Requirements and Path to Purchase: Analysis of consumer expectations for booking and purchasing travel.
- Attitudes About Travel: Study of travel timing and considerations for Northern Ontario as a destination.

This research will provide critical insights to guide DNO's marketing, product development, and workforce training strategies over the next five years. It will also support evidence-based decision-making at the provincial, urban, and rural levels, ensuring significant growth in tourism receipts and job creation. The project is expected to position Northern Ontario favorably in the competitive tourism market, leveraging both domestic and international opportunities.

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 **5:00 p.m.** local time in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario on **August 30, 2024** (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

- **September 27 - November 3 (5 weeks): Research Design and Planning (with Consultant)**
 - Collaborate with the selected consultant to finalize research methodologies, data collection techniques, and survey instruments.
 - Define roles and responsibilities for the consultant and internal project team members.
 - Develop a detailed work plan and timeline for the research project, incorporating input from the consultant.

- Purchase key data and insights to supplement research efforts and inform decision-making.
- **November 3 - February 16 (15 weeks): Research Execution (with Consultant)**
 - Oversee the consultant's execution of the research project, providing guidance, support, and oversight as needed.
 - Monitor progress and quality of work throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases.
 - Regularly communicate with the consultant to address any issues or challenges that arise during the research process.
 - Review interim deliverables and provide feedback to ensure alignment with project objectives and stakeholder expectations.
 - Provide draft report for Northern Marketing Committee early January.
- **February 16 - May 21: Project Wrap-Up, Translation, and Reporting**
 - Provide final report and research results
 - Provide a presentation of final report in-person (location TBD) at end of reporting period
 - Work closely with the consultant to finalize the research report, incorporating feedback from internal team members and stakeholders.
 - Ensure the consultant provides all necessary documentation and data.
 - Ensure all project deliverables are completed and submitted according to project timelines.
 - Translate all research and relative documents into French (ensuring proper logo recognition)
 - Evaluate project outcomes and lessons learned for future project planning and implementation.

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 and how they will effectively translate all documents and communication to French.

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 client. To successfully execute the Northern Ontario Priority Product and Travel Trend Research project, a consulting firm would need to demonstrate the following corporate experience and qualifications:
 - Corporate Experience Requirements
 - Extensive Research Experience
 - General Experience: At least ten (10) years of experience in conducting large-scale research projects, particularly in the tourism sector

- Specific Experience: Proven track record in tourism research, including market analysis, travel trends, and consumer behavior studies
 - Sector-Specific Expertise
 - Tourism and Hospitality: Experience in researching various tourism segments such as nature-based tourism, angling, hunting, cultural and heritage tourism, adventure tourism, powersports and business travel
 - Geographical Knowledge: Familiarity with the unique geographical and market dynamics of Northern Ontario, including sub-regions like Northwest (13C), Algoma (13B), and Northeastern Ontario (13A)
 - Technical and Analytical Skills
 - Data Collection and Analysis: Expertise in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including survey design, data collection, and statistical analysis
 - Economic Impact Analysis: Ability to conduct economic impact studies, including labor statistics and value-added analysis
 - Project Management
 - Large-Scale Project Management: Experience in managing complex research projects, ensuring timely delivery of milestones and final reports
 - Collaboration and Communication: Strong skills in collaborating with multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, regional partners, and industry associations
 - Marketing and Strategic Planning
 - Marketing Strategy Development: Ability to translate research findings into actionable marketing strategies and product development plans
 - Consumer Insights: Experience in analyzing consumer planning journeys, media consumption, and travel intentions to inform marketing efforts
 - Reporting and Documentation
 - Comprehensive Reporting: Proficiency in preparing detailed research reports, including interim deliverables and final comprehensive reports
 - Documentation and Data Management: Ensuring all necessary documentation and data are provided and maintained throughout the project lifecycle
- 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 work back schedule with an assumed project kick-off date of September 27, 2024 .The schedule should identify:
 - Key project components as listed in project timelines and deliverables
 - The schedule should identify the expected duration and total work effort required for each component, as well as planned resources identified
 - The work back schedule should also indicate expected client review and approval steps
- Pricing
- Submissions must not include appendices (unless otherwise stated).
- File size must not exceed 6 MB and files are to be submitted in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format.

D. Detailed Project Information

1. Summary and Objectives

2. Scope of Work

The following scope of work breaks down the components of the project into research and data needs;

- New travel segments and trends as they relate to;
 - RTO13 Northern Ontario geography including
 - 13C (Northwest)
 - 13B (Algoma)
 - 13A (Northeastern Ontario)
 - Priority Products – research would aim to identify which product is defined as an inspire and grow product OR a defend and maintain product
 - **Inspire and Grow: a product or experience that has excellent potential for growth in consumer base, revenue, and inventory. Market shares need to be developed; product inventory needs growth; existing product may need diversification.**
 - **Defend and Maintain: a product or experience that is well established in consumer base, revenue, and inventory. Market shares need to be protected; consumer base may need expansion.**
 - Angling and Hunting
 - Angling
 - Hunting
 - Culture and Heritage
 - Indigenous

- Francophone
- Group of Seven
- LGBT
- Gateway and Destination Communities
 - Attractions
 - Festivals and Events
 - MICE
- Nature and Adventure
 - Parks and Campgrounds
 - Paddling
 - Trails
 - Cycling
- Touring
 - Boating
 - Auto/RV
 - Motorcycle
 - Snowmobile
- Business Development
 - Travel Trade
 - Group Tour
 - Student Tour

Segment Profiles (US and Domestic)

- Generation Z
- Millennials
- Baby Boomers
 - Generation Y

Intentions

- Income
- Travel distance
- Length of trip
- Cost of trip
- Consumer planning journey and media outlets
- Reasons for travel (VFR, Leisure/Pleasure, Business)

Research should also include;

- Information as it relates to shoulder season travel
- Expectations for booking requirements and path to purchase
- Attitudes about travel (timing of travel and consideration of Northern Ontario)
- Alignment and consideration of the current RTO research project undertaken with DestinationNEXT and RTO partners

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
- Training Fees (for staff external of bidder's company)
- 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 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 research and data analysis and collection, travel trends and segments and Northern Ontario tourism travel corridors.
- 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. 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



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engagement would again be based on the above and a negotiated annual contract for the fiscal period identified.