



COASTAL MISSISSIPPI REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: PUBLIC RELATIONS SERVICES Tourism Industry Recovery, II

Proposals due on or before 5:00 p.m. CDT on August 16, 2023.

INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, d/b/a **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** (“Bureau” or “**COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**”), is charged with attracting and serving visitors by communicating and facilitating the **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** experience. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**’s multi-faceted Public Relations and outreach approach includes local, statewide, regional, domestic, and international markets. The Bureau is searching for a Public Relations agency that will offer a strategic and creative approach based on sound research that will increase awareness of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** as a travel and tourism destination and attract overnight visitors.

ABOUT COASTAL MISSISSIPPI

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI is a political subdivision of the State of Mississippi governed by 15 Commissioners appointed by the Boards of Supervisors of Harrison, Jackson, and Hancock Counties with a fiscal year spanning October 1 through September 30.

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant disruption to businesses in the hospitality sector, including hotels, restaurants, and small businesses. Additionally, many tourism attractions experienced sharp declines in revenue and visitation.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this RFP is to seek qualified agencies who have a working knowledge of the tourism industry and can demonstrate the necessary experience to produce **research and strategy, media outreach, messaging and positioning, media material development, event planning and execution, content creation, social/digital collaboration, monitoring and reporting** for **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI’S** **leisure travel market, meetings & conventions market, and sports tourism market**. Although it is our intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters, including the scope of work and cost.

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI intends to contract with a qualified agency to support its continued recovery efforts, stemmed from the negative economic impacts of COVID-19. Future projects undertaken by the selected agency that are enumerated or implied to fall under the scope of this RFP may be paid in whole, in part, or not at all, by federal and state grants. The aforementioned grants may be currently awarded to **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** or may be awarded in the future. These funds may be used so long as it is deemed appropriate under the scope of the grant and meets the legal requirements of such. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** reserves the right to make these determinations on an as-needed basis, and any payments are not to be construed as a grant award unless explicitly stated to be such. Coastal Mississippi makes no warranties express or implied herein, regarding grant awards in this RFP.

Further, in compliance with federal and state statutes, **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** encourages small, minority, and women-owned businesses to respond to this RFP. As such, this RFP will be placed on MS PTAP, the bureau's website, and placed in the newspaper at the time of publication to ensure equal opportunity for all to respond. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** will comply with all procurement requirements outlined in 2 CFR §200.321

*This RFP in no way commits **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** to award a contract, to pay any costs in preparation of a proposal, or to contract for the goods and/or services offered. Although it is **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**'s intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters, including the scope of work and cost.*

TARGET AUDIENCE DETAILS

As our marketing efforts grow in scale, so do our efforts to connect with travelers that represent large and enduring growth opportunities for Coastal Mississippi. We will continue to monitor universal changes in traveler sentiment and behaviors; however, the primary focus will be on the Experiential Travelers Audience.

While there remains room for growth within the Experiential Traveler audience, we see an opportunity to expand the definition and diversify the audience by better understanding the multicultural makeup and focus on how to reach and connect with all who wish to visit.

CORE EXPERIENTIAL TRAVELER

Traveling with friends, partners or solo. Frequent travelers seeking new travel experiences off the beaten path.

FAMILY EXPERIENTIAL TRAVELER

Traveling with family, young and old. Seasonal travelers seeking out travel experiences that build stronger bonds.

SCOPE OF WORK

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI wishes to employ an outside agency to produce an overall **dynamic public relations strategy** including but not limited to reputation management, brand integrity, media relations, organic social media, event planning, outreach, research, media training, copywriting, and creation of various collateral pieces for use as content and messaging, print and digital, traditional print, broadcast media, website redesign, and others relevant components. The agency would manage TRF2 funds for the remainder of FY23, becoming the creative agency of record for FY24 and FY25.

The agency should recommend an overall **Public Relations strategy** to clearly position **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** to visitors as an affordable and attractive open destination for those who enjoy traveling, specifically in its top drive markets and fly markets. It will be imperative to ensure this scope of services adheres to any changing public health guidelines and is conveyed in an informed manner.

The selected agency's responsibilities will include the below:

- Create a portfolio of messaging and provide assistance with identifying fulfillment material gaps, including photos, videos, and testimonials, for use in promotional materials and sustainable travel campaign
- Develop and build a public relations strategy
- Create dynamic campaigns for niche visitor segments based on behavior and travel trends

- Develop campaign to attract visitors to each of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**'s defined markets

AVAILABLE FUNDS

BUDGET: **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** will fund this contract at a minimum of \$300,000.00 with an opportunity for additional funding through additional funding sources, including but not limited to state and federal grants. This budget is based on creative production, account management fees, and out-of-pocket expenses. This budget will be implemented in phases over a two-year period.

BILLING: **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** will pay monthly. Invoices must be dated and received by the 15th day of the month for payment in the following month. Invoices should be on letterhead from the selected agency and include the month(s) for which payment is due as well as **detail of work completed with appropriate back-up from third parties and available analytic reports**, at the mutually agreed upon rate(s) or amount in the executed contract and all back-up including detailed invoices, contracts, or subscriptions from third party or contracted vendors.

OFFICIAL CONTACT

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI requests the proposer designate one person to receive all communications for clarification and verification of information related to this proposal. **(Attachment 1).**

TIMELINE

This tentative timeline may be altered at any time at the discretion of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**.

RFP available to agencies	July 17, 2023 by 5:00p.m. CDT
Final day to submit questions regarding this RFP	July 27, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Questions answered	August 2, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. CDT	August 16, 2023 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Proposals evaluated by RFP committee	August 19-23, 2023
Agencies under consideration will be interviewed. Follow-up interviews will be conducted during this time frame as needed	August 28, 2023
Agency selected, and contract negotiations begin	August 31, 2023
Work begins for a limited duration, decided in contract negotiations	September 6, 2023

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS & DELIVERABLES

Your response to this RFP must be submitted in the following format and labeled accordingly:

A. Statement of Qualifications – Provide a written statement of your agency's qualifications for providing the work as described in the Scope of Work

B. Tourism Experience – Provide a written statement of your involvement in the tourism industry, specifically with DMO clients, industry memberships and resources

C. Organization, Ownership and Management

1. Name, address and telephone of the entity that will be contracted with and all trade names to be used
2. Name, address and telephone numbers of the organization's principal officers and other owners

D. Organization's Structure and Experience

1. Organizational chart of company, including any subcontractors who will work with **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**
2. Total number of employees including full time, part time and contract workers
3. Summary of employees who will work on the account including their name, title, a short summary of their qualifications and their main role in working with **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**.
4. Hours of operation that staff will be available and any satellite offices
5. Experience as it relates to **creative content, messaging, campaign strategy, and ad design**. No more than **three** relevant case studies should be provided, including project goals with measurable KPIs and results. Creative work should be included for each case study.

E. Client Information

1. Current clients in descending order of size
2. List your two most recent past clients and reason for termination
3. List any travel/tourism clients and their current status

F. Account Gain and Loss

1. Indicate if the agency has had a contract terminated for non-performance over the last five years with either litigation determining the agency at fault or no litigation due to inaction on part of the organization.
2. List of accounts gained over the last two years and why your organization was awarded the work.
3. Three references that are current accounts with contact names, email and phone numbers

E. Conflict(s) of Interest - The proposer must declare and provide details of any actual, potential, or perceived conflict(s) of interest.

F. Certification Form – Certification Form (**Attachment 2**) must be signed and accompany all RFP Response submissions.

G. Budget - Please provide a proposed budget based on the balance of FY23 and a full year for the remaining two years of the contract for Scope of Work, and out-of-pocket expenses. Note: Although **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**'s fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30; please base your proposed budget on the 12-month period.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

1. Submittals in response to this request and respondents' participation in the process shall be at no cost or obligation to **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** reserves the right to, at any time, abandon or terminate its efforts to contract for any or all of said services without any obligation to any respondent.
2. Responses to this request and other materials submitted shall become the property of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** and will not be returned.

3. Respondent shall not contact any **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** personnel or staff after this request has been advertised, except to ask questions as specified below under "Respondent Questions." Such contact will be considered cause for disqualification.
4. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** may waive any informalities or minor defects or reject any and all submittals.
5. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** reserves the right to reject any submittal if the evidence submitted by, or investigation of, such respondent demonstrates that such respondent or its subcontractors, in **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** 's opinion, is not properly qualified to carry out the obligations of the Contract or to complete the Work contemplated therein.
6. All applicable laws, ordinances, and the rules and regulations of all governmental authorities having jurisdiction shall apply to the Contract throughout.
7. This Contract is being funded through a grant provided to **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** by the State of Mississippi as part its ARPA State and Local Fiscal Relief Fund (SLFRF) allocation received from the U.S. Treasury Department. The SLFRF program places numerous obligations on recipients and subrecipients, which flow down to successful respondent. Each respondent is cautioned to carefully review the *Supplemental Terms and Conditions* which are a part of the sample contract and to ensure that all responsibilities and obligations are properly addressed.
8. By executing a signature on the submittal, respondent certifies that:
 - a. Neither the respondent, nor any of its team members, is currently debarred from submitting proposals or entering into contracts issued by any political subdivision or agency of the State of Mississippi or the Federal Government.
 - b. No Federally appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the respondent, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.
 - c. If any funds other than Federally appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, respondent shall complete and submit Standard Form LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions.

EVALUATION & SELECTION

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI will establish a committee to evaluate and rate all proposals based on the criteria prescribed. Bids will be opened in the first scheduled meeting of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** following the date bids are due; provided, however, that **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**, in the event of a finding of exigent circumstances, may authorize the President of the Board of Commissioners, the Chief Executive Officer and another officer of the Board of Commissioners to open bids and to report the results thereof to the Board of Commissioners.

SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 1

Proposals meeting all requirements of the RFP will be evaluated by a review committee and ranked based on the following selection criteria. Top agencies will be chosen for Step 2.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Tourism Industry Experience | 15% |
| • Qualifications to execute the plan of work, including costs of services | 60% |
| • References from past clients | 10% |

- Evaluation of prior work

15%

SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 2

Top agencies will be invited to present, in person or via video conference, their suggested framework.

Presentations will be ranked by the following criteria:

- Agency's expertise in diverse but cohesive strategies for driving tourism demand 60%
- Ability to illustrate return on investment for suggested strategies 25%
- Suggestions to address current and forecasted traveler sentiment 15%

SELECTION PROCESS – STEP 3

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI**, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFP. Upon completing the selection process under this RFP, **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** will notify the winning proposer and all other proposers who were not selected. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI's** evaluations of proposals are confidential and as such, **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** is unable to respond to any questions and/or requests for information as to why a company was not selected.

After awarding the contract, the schedule will include a period of collaboration between **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** and the selected agency to better define, elaborate upon, and update the agency's final Scope of Work and general Terms and Conditions. For the selected agency, an employee will be designated as your contact and will coordinate any materials needed or questions answered with all other **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** employees.

STANDARD CONTRACT

Following is a copy of **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI's** standard contract template to be referenced for this proposal. By responding to this request, the respondent is asserting its intent to accept the terms and conditions contained therein unless exceptions to the contract are provided as part of the respondent's submittal.

DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS

Please submit 10 hard copy responses along with a digital version of the proposal on a hard drive or USB drive. All proposals should include a clear, concise narrative. Proposal format is open to presentation style but must include the aforementioned items.

Printed submissions must be marked "**RFP: Public Relations Services**" and delivered to:

COASTAL MISSISSIPPI

Attn: Pattye Meagher, Director of Communications & Engagement
2350 Beach Boulevard, Suite A
Biloxi, Mississippi 39531

Submittals received in any manner not specifically set forth above shall not be accepted or considered. Submittals received after the deadline will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the respondent to ensure that the submittal is received by the specified deadline. The delivery date and time will be recorded upon receipt. **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** will not be responsible for late or incomplete responses due to mistakes or delays of the respondent or carrier used by the respondent or weather delays. **A postmark will not be considered proof of timely submission.**

QUESTIONS

Note that all answers regarding questions and requests for clarification for this RFP will be responded to publicly on the **COASTAL MISSISSIPPI** website consistent with the aforementioned schedule to ensure that all respondents have the same information. Please email all questions regarding this RFP to pattye@coastalmississippi.com. No calls, please.