

VISITHATTIESBURG REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:
ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY AND MONITORING

Tourism Industry Recovery, II



Proposals due on or before 5:00 p.m. CST on January 24, 2024.

OBJECTIVE

The Hattiesburg Tourism Commission is issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek formal quotes from destination research experts to develop an economic impact study lookback from 2019 to current. This study will assess the effects of COVID-19 from the onset of the pandemic to present on the tourism industry and the recovery of tourism in Hattiesburg, MS. VisitHATTIESBURG also desires an interactive dashboard for economic data and travel indicators for Hattiesburg, MS. This dashboard should include digital marketing campaign monitoring analysis and engagement tracking to our destination including visitor spending. The dashboard should show current metrics that will provide a roadmap to VisitHATTIESBURG in how to maintain and enhance its positioning relative to competitive destination markets, as well as to identify growth markets for leisure travelers, as well as group meetings, conventions and sports travelers. Although it is VisitHATTIESBURG’s intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, VisitHATTIESBURG may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.

VisitHATTIESBURG intends to contract with a qualified research firm to support its continued recovery efforts, stemmed from the negative economic impacts of COVID-19. This contract will be funded through federal ARPA dollars for Mississippi Tourism Recovery, II.

This RFP in no way commits VisitHATTIESBURG 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 VisitHATTIESBURG’s intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, VisitHATTIESBURG may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

VisitHATTIESBURG wishes to employ an outside firm to execute research with a lookback to 2019 through present culminating in a full tourism economic impact study, as well as a 3-5-year interactive tourism data dashboard. The scope of services listed below is not intended to be a comprehensive list of what the firm will provide. The final scope of services will be developed in collaboration with the selected firm.

The selected firm’s responsibilities will include the following:

- Research with a look back to all years since 2019 to present
- Through research identify and assess gaps in the area’s tourism infrastructure which, if filled, would position Hattiesburg as a competitive, top-tier leisure, meeting and sports destination market
- Indicate the number of visitors to Hattiesburg and spending habits of visitors to Hattiesburg
- Reveal key performance indicators to measure and track goal achievement
- Identify potential new or enhanced tourism demand generators
- Show data on current attractions, events or assets to drive demand, as well as opportunities for growth

- Identify how tourism impacts the workforce and drives population growth

In order to achieve these responsibilities, the selected firm will:

- Develop an interactive dashboard that integrates economic data and travel indicators for Hattiesburg
- The interactive dashboard will integrate digital marketing campaign analytics and engagement tracking to the destination including visitors spending.
- Provide data since 2019 on visitors that include leisure, group meetings, conventions and sports travelers
- Identify target markets, services areas and organizational strategies to enhance Hattiesburg’s tourism industry
- Research various destinations that VisitHATTIESBURG can compare and benchmark itself against

Deliverables:

- A comprehensive written report presented to VisitHATTIESBURG and the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission upon completion of the project
- An assessment of the existing tourism product in Hattiesburg with an analysis of strengths and future opportunities
- An interactive dashboard that VisitHATTIESBURG team members can access integrating all tourism economics services and digital media campaign analytics which allow VisitHATTIESBURG to gauge the effectiveness and adequacy of the current destination marketing program and recommended strategies to improve these initiatives. Particular emphasis should be provided on how VisitHATTIESBURG can enhance these efforts to ensure the overall increased visitation goal is met. This assessment should include recommended operating guidelines for the programs to achieve the desired development results.

ABOUT VISITHATTIESBURG

VisitHATTIESBURG is a research-driven destination management organization with annual collections of approximately \$800,000, derived from the collection of a 2% lodging tax on the gross proceeds from hotel overnight room rental.

VISITHATTIESBURG’S MISSION: To actively position Hattiesburg as a year-round premier leisure and business destination in the Gulf South.

VISITHATTIESBURG’S VISION: To ignite tourism economic growth in Hattiesburg through strategic vision and collaborative leadership while enhancing local quality of life.

VISITHATTIESBURG’S FOCUS AREAS: VisitHBURG’s operations strategies and activities focus on four specific core values, which are:

1. Grow tourism’s economic impact in HBURG
2. Communicate and amplify the HBURG story
3. Prioritize placemaking and enhance the HBURG experience
4. Strengthen partner network and collaboration

DESTINATION WEBSITE: www.visithburg.org

DESTINATION BACKGROUND & STATE OF ECONOMY

With a \$300 million tourism economy at its height, Hattiesburg offers a variety of activities for visitors, including award-winning culinary, outdoor recreation, a vibrant live music scene, an internationally recognized art scene, breweries, festivals, and historical trails and museums. Visitors also come to Hattiesburg for corporate meetings, conventions, academia, military, medical, and sporting events, including adult, youth, and collegiate.

Hattiesburg is home to two major universities, a thriving regional healthcare cluster, the largest joint forces military training base in the U.S., an artistic downtown, a newly developed midtown district, an award-winning zoo, and approximately 3,000 hotel rooms. The Greater Hattiesburg area is Mississippi's third most visited city. Often referred to as the Hub City, Hattiesburg is centrally located less than 90 minutes from New Orleans, Mobile, the Mississippi Gulf Coast and Mississippi's capital city, Jackson.

The business disruption effects of COVID-19 had great negative economic impact on Hattiesburg's travel industry, with visitor spending totaling \$257 million in 2020, a steep decline of more than \$43 million from the previous record-breaking year. According to the U.S. Travel Association, Tourism Economics, U.S. travel is not expected to return to its pre-pandemic economic impact until 2026.

Hattiesburg competes for tourists, consumers, and available workforce talent to strengthen its numerous economic development sectors. Because of its many outdoor accommodations, ample meeting space, and VisitHATTIESBURG's strategic use of CARES Act funding, Hattiesburg ended 2021 as one of the top cities in Mississippi and the nation for recovery and visitor spending. In all, spending increased by 9% to a total of \$280 million.

VisitHATTIESBURG leveraged CARES Act funding to aggressively market, its destination. As those funds ran out, VisitHATTIESBURG invested its local tourism dollars, earned from increased visitation. Now that money is exhausted, growth has significantly slowed.

As of 2022, many restaurants, hotels, and attractions are still struggling in Hattiesburg to return to pre-pandemic figures. While some of closed their doors for good, unable to overcome the hardships, others continue fighting to remain open despite workforce issues, rising costs, and supply chain delays. In 2019, the tourism sector employed more than 4,000 Mississippians in Greater Hattiesburg, which has not been fully regained.

Hattiesburg is now witnessing a decline, once again, in visitor spending and attendance due to nationwide issues, such as inflation, public health concerns, and depleted marketing funds for recovery. VisitHATTIESBURG must inspire travel and capture its share of the market to help aid in economic recovery for the city.

VISITHATTIESBURG TARGET AUDIENCE DETAILS

Largely a drive market, Hattiesburg is a destination for travelers of all interests. Travelers to Hattiesburg include both day-trippers and overnighters, those looking for a weekend getaway, a rest stop between other major destinations, or conducting business. They are typically millennials, baby boomers, or multi-generation families.

Through VisitHATTIESBURG's long-range strategic plan research in 2019-20, it was discovered that Hattiesburg's leisure audience is interested in local cuisine, breweries/craft beer, shopping, sporting events, history, outdoor recreation, art, theatre and live music. Corporate visitors in Hattiesburg come from various industry sectors but are typically from organizations and associations who meet in

Hattiesburg. Additionally, Hattiesburg’s visitor is educated, often a solo traveler or couple, and values a feeling of togetherness within a community.

Overall, VisitHATTIESBURG’s goal is to attract such travelers and increase overnight visitation to the destination.

VISITHATTIESBURG’S KEY BEHAVIOR MARKETS:



AVAILABLE FUNDS

VisitHATTIESBURG will fund this contract at a **minimum** of \$25,000. The budget is based on research, analysis, development of interactive dashboard and collaboration with VisitHATTIESBURG and their previously contracted vendors. This budget will be implemented in phases over a three-year period. The three-year period will include services rendered beginning February 2024 – December 2024 (CY24), January 2025 – December 2025 (CY25), and January 2026 – December 2026 (CY26).

TIMELINE

This tentative timeline may be altered at any time at the discretion of VisitHATTIESBURG and will be funded through federal ARPA dollars for Mississippi Tourism Recovery, II.

RFP available to agencies.	Jan. 10, 2024
Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. CST.	JAN. 24, 2024 by 5:00 p.m. CST
Proposals evaluated by RFP committee.	JAN.25-26, 2024
Firm selected, and contract negotiations begin.	JAN. 31, 2024
Work begins for a limited duration, decided in contract negotiations.	FEB. 1, 2024

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 firm’s ability to meet the Scope of Work.
- B. **Tourism Experience** – Detail your involvement in the tourism industry, specifically with DMO clients, industry memberships and resources.
- C. **Organization, Ownership and Management**
 - a. Entity details and all trade names.
 - b. Name of the organization’s principal officers and other owners.
- D. **Organization’s Structure and Experience**
 - a. An organizational chart.
 - b. Employee count, including the breakdown of full-time, part-time, and contract workers.
 - c. Brief history of the company, especially as it relates to work in the tourism sector.
 - d. Summary of employees who will work on the account, including their name, title, a summary of qualifications, and their main role working with VisitHATTIESBURG.
 - e. Experience as it relates to knowledge of existing tourism and state association trends and key goals and ability to present findings in a useful manner. No more than three relevant case studies should be provided, including project goals with measurable KPIs and results.
- E. **Client Information** – Clientele summary and creative samples. Notate any travel/tourism clients.
- F. **References** – Three current account references with contact names, email, and phone numbers.
- G. **Conflict(s) of Interest** – Declare and provide details of any actual, potential, or perceived conflict(s) of interest. If there are none, clearly state this in the proposal.
- H. **Budget** – Please provide a proposal budget based on the project’s full scope of work. This budget should include strategy execution, account management, out-of-pocket expenses and any costs related to traveling to Hattiesburg.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- 1. Submittals in response to this request and respondents' participation in the process shall be at no cost or obligation to VisitHATTIESBURG. VisitHATTIESBURG 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 VisitHATTIESBURG and will not be returned.
- 3. Respondent shall not contact any VisitHATTIESBURG personnel or staff after this request has been advertised, except for the identified staff below. Such contact will be considered cause for disqualification.
- 4. VisitHATTIESBURG may waive any informalities or minor defects or reject any and all submittals.
- 5. VisitHATTIESBURG 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 VisitHATTIESBURG'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 VisitHATTIESBURG 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 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 submitting a response to this RFP, 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.

SMALL, MINORITY & WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES:

In compliance with federal and state statutes, VisitHATTIESBURG encourages small, minority and women-owned businesses to respond to this RFP. As such, this RFP will also be placed on MS PTAP at the time of publication to ensure equal opportunity for all to respond.

EVALUATION & SELECTION

VisitHATTIESBURG will establish a committee to evaluate and rate all proposals based on the criteria prescribed.

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.

- Qualifications to execute scope of services and pricing [50%]
- Ability to provide thorough and practical recommendations for research since 2019 [20%]
- Ability to provide an interactive dashboard to accomplishing the goals of the project [20%]
- Tourism Industry Experience and references from past clients [10%]

Selection Process – Step 2

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to VisitHATTIESBURG, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFP. Upon completing the selection process under this RFP, VisitHATTIESBURG will notify the winning proposer and all other proposers who were not selected. VisitHATTIESBURG's evaluations of proposals are confidential and as such, VisitHATTIESBURG 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 VisitHATTIESBURG and the selected firm to better define, elaborate upon, and update the firm's final Scope of Work and general Terms and Conditions. For the selected firm, an employee will be designated as your contact and will coordinate any materials needed or questions answered with all other VisitHATTIESBURG employees.

DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS

Please submit your responses in electronic format. All proposals should include a clear, concise narrative. Proposal format is open to presentation style but must include the aforementioned items.

Electronic submissions should be provided in PDF format and sent to probertson@visithburg.org with the subject line: "RFP: Economic Impact Study and Monitoring." Proposals may not be faxed.

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. VisitHATTIESBURG will not be responsible for late or incomplete responses due to mistakes or delays of the respondent or carrier used by the respondent.

QUESTIONS

Email Paige Robertson with any questions at probertson@visithburg.org. No calls, please.