



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

### **Washington State Destination Publicity Program**

**Date:** June 22, 2021

**Issued by:** Washington Tourism Alliance

**Period of contract:** July 28, 2021 – July 28, 2022

**Proposal Deadline:** July 16, 2021, 5 p.m. Pacific Time

**Budget:** \$80,000-\$90,000

#### **OBJECTIVE**

The Washington Tourism Alliance is initiating this Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a qualified travel PR agency that will work with WTA staff to create a robust travel publicity program for Washington State.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND**

The Washington Tourism Alliance (WTA) is a non-profit organization that was created and launched by the statewide tourism industry when the state tourism office was closed by the legislature in 2011. Broad industry segments - including destination marketing organizations (DMOs), hotels, attractions, tours and transportation, tribes, cultural interests and others - coalesced to find a sustainable, long-term funding mechanism to support a destination marketing program. In the wake of the state tourism office's funding travails, industry leaders emphatically proclaimed that this new model must be industry led and industry funded.

Years of industry work and advocacy followed with multiple plans tested. Ultimately, the funding model that achieved both industry and legislative support was a private-public 2:1 match program with a maximum of \$3 million in state funds per biennium unlocked by \$6 million in private sector contributions. The state funds are drawn from 0.2 percent of existing general sales taxes collected on retail sales of lodging, restaurants and rental cars.

Governor Jay Inslee signed the bill into law on March 18, 2018. The Tourism Promotion Act includes several other provisions, including establishment of the Washington Tourism Marketing Authority (WTMA), an oversight board to select a contracted non-profit marketing organization to run the marketing program, monitor and evaluate its success and define the matching funds needed to procure state general funds. In December 2018, the WTMA selected the Washington Tourism Alliance to fulfill a five-year contract.

As directed by the legislation, the WTA will re-establish and run a state destination marketing and communications program. Focus must be given to driving inbound (out-of-state) visitors that generate economic impact; rural tourism-dependent counties; natural wonders; outdoor recreation; attracting international visitors; assistance for tourism communities affected by natural disasters; and cooperation (partnerships) with local tourism organizations.

Work to re-build a statewide destination marketing program is underway. The WTA's growing staff,

working committees and board of directors have made significant progress in baseline consumer marketing and co-op programs with partners, travel trade development, consumer website, continuation of a state visitor guide, visitor information and other essentials of a state tourism program.

While a responsive travel media relations program is in place, the WTA does not currently have the sufficient staff to run a proactive, ongoing travel publicity program. In addition to a travel PR agency retainer, the WTA plans to hire a media relations manager later in 2021.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

The scope of agency work should include, but is not limited to:

- Media relations and outreach to travel, features and general news media
- Preparation of destination press materials, including press kits, releases, fact sheets and others as needed
- Monthly tracking and reporting of earned media coverage of Washington State
- Establish, maintain and supply a travel and features media data base available for agency and WTA usage
- Coordination and PR support for local and national media events
- Coordination of media missions and events in designated markets
- Representing the destination at top media marketplaces
- Collaborative and creative brainstorming on news potential, story pitches and media outreach
- Coordination of media visits in Washington State, including individual and group press trips
- Crisis communications, as needed

## **RFP SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

1. Summary of organization:
  - a. Name and address
  - b. Contact information
  - c. Legal forms and Federal Employee Identification Number
  - d. Formation date
  - e. Description of organization (history, size, philosophy, services provided)
2. Brief overview of your agency history, philosophy, culture, and structure
3. Agency's key differentiator: What makes you stand apart from other agencies?
4. Team structure: Who will be the team assigned to us should you be awarded the work? How does that team work together and in collaboration with the WTA staff?
5. Please provide team bios
6. Experience and success with other destination tourism marketing organizations, nonprofit and/or similar economic development or trade/industry associations.
7. In-depth list of your agency capabilities and how they differentiate you, particularly as it applies to the leisure travel and hospitality industry
8. Three samples of relevant work, including experience with destination and/or travel publicity

9. Provide a detailed budget for scope of work and billing structure (e.g retainer, hourly rates for work outside of scope, time and materials, project based, etc.) and estimated cost and timeline against deliverables.
10. Include at least three references of other destinations and/or brand work including individual contact name, name of company, title, email and phone number.

\*Preferred submission length 20 pages or less

## **BUDGET**

A one-year retainer with a budget range of \$80,000-\$90,000 is intended to be competitive and commensurate with service provided.

The Washington Tourism Alliance is a 501[c]6 organization established by industry stakeholders with the sole mission of developing and sustaining Washington State destination marketing. The WTA procures and administers funds for state destination tourism marketing activities and creates and implements a strategic statewide destination marketing plan. We are seeking nonprofit rates in our agency relationship.

## **SUBMISSION DEADLINE AND POINT OF CONTACT**

All proposals must be received by the Washington Tourism Alliance via email to [wtainfo@watourismalliance.com](mailto:wtainfo@watourismalliance.com) no later than Friday, July 16 at 5pm Pacific Time. Email subject line should clearly state "RFP WA State PR." Late proposals may not be considered.

## **QUESTIONS**

Potential bidders may submit written questions and requests for clarification about the RFP via email to Michelle Thana at [michelle@watourismalliance.com](mailto:michelle@watourismalliance.com). Please submit questions no later than Wednesday, July 7 at 5 p.m. Responses will be provided by Monday, July 12 at 5 p.m.

## **ADDENDA**

In the event it is necessary to amend, revise or supplement any part of the RFP, addenda will be provided to all known proposers. Any addenda so issued are to be considered part of the specifications of the RFP. The WTA is not responsible for any explanation, clarification, interpretation or approval made or given in any manner except by written addenda issued by the WTA.

## **PROPOSAL OWNERSHIP**

All material submitted by the proposers shall be considered the property of the WTA.

## **CRITERIA FOR SELECTION**

All proposals submitted will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Experience: 30%
  - Experience working with DMOs and/or promoting a destination; experience in the travel PR space
  - Deep travel/media relationships in place
- Approach to establishing a robust and sustained travel publicity program: 30%
  - Approach to grow earned media coverage and elevate the destination's presence in the consumer marketplace
- Team structure and aptitude in working with WTA team : 20%
  - Proactive approach to stimulating publicity and sustaining the PR program
  - Collegial outlook and ability to work with WTA staff
- Budget: 20%
  - Relative to scope and WTA program objectives
  - Nonprofit rates

## **SELECTION PROCESS**

The WTA's agency selection committee may call finalists in for an in-person or oral interview. The committee will make a recommendation to the WTA board for approval. The WTA will enter into a contract with selected agency.

### **Estimated schedule:**

- Evaluate proposals: July 16-21
- Conduct virtual interviews with finalists: July 22-23
- Announce selected agency and notify unsuccessful proposers: July 26
- Begin work: July 28

## **INCURRING COSTS**

The WTA is not liable for any cost incurred by proposers prior to issuance of a contract.

## **RIGHT TO REJECT ALL PROPOSALS**

The WTA reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, and to accept the proposal deemed in the best interests of the WTA.