



## **Request for Proposals for Strategic Plan/Tourism Master Plan and Destination Research**

The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority is seeking qualified proposals from highly respected professionals familiar with leading the organizational strategic planning process for Destination Marketing Organizations and conducting destination research. Your company is kindly invited to submit your proposal for the requested services.

### **Background Information**

Jackson County TDA, established in 2012, serves as the Destination Marketing/Management Organization for the county and its towns of Cashiers, Cherokee, Dillsboro and Sylva. The TDA's mission is to promote growth of tourism opportunities that benefits the Jackson County economy. The JCTDA has a proven track record for research-based marketing and public relations initiatives which have grown market share significantly in recent years.

### **Information about Jackson County's Tourism Economy**

- a) The TDA's occupancy tax rate is 4-percent with the ability to set it at a local level by County Commissioners to a maximum of 6-percent. The TDA may dedicate  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its occupancy tax collections to Capital investments (brick-and-mortar tourism development projects).
- b) The TDA was formed in 2012 with the consolidation of two geographically centered TTA's in Sylva and Cashiers which served as the effective DMOs prior to consolidation. The consolidated board had 15-members and has been reduced to 9-members for operational efficiency. In 2017, the chair, vice chair, secretary and marketing chair rotated off the board. The terms were later re-staggered to prevent significant experience rotating off the board at the same time.
- c) The TDA has one staff member, Executive Director, hired in 2016 to oversee day-to-day operations.
- d) Room occupancy tax collections have increased 43-percent in five years - \$750,000 collected in FY 13-14 and \$1,080,000 (projected) in FY 17-18. The TDA receives 100-percent of its occupancy tax collections and is not funded by state or local government.
- e) Airbnb and vacation rentals grow at an exponential rate - November 2017 collections for October 2017 Airbnb stays grew 256% over the prior year and 754% over a two-year period. Many months have experienced similar growth both year over year and since Airbnb began remitting two years ago.

- f) We have no convention centers; Harrah's Cherokee Casino does have a convention center and is in geographic Jackson County, however, the Casino resides on tribal lands, which are a sovereign nation, and in as much we do not receive occupancy tax. Our total room count for hotels is around 725. Six chain properties have reported to STR since at least January 2016.
- g) At the end of last fiscal year (June 30, 2017), motels and hotels accounted for 39.66% of occupancy tax collections, followed by vacation rentals - 22.08%, resorts - 18.49%, cabins and cottages - 15.21%, bed and breakfasts - 4.21%, camps and RV's - 0.36%
- h) One of our major resorts will go offline for an extended period of time while extensive renovations and investments are made, which will impact our budget temporarily while ultimately enhancing offerings here.
- i) Additional board information, tourism fact sheets, funding programs and information is available online at [www.JacksonCountyTDA.com](http://www.JacksonCountyTDA.com). The public facing DMO website is [www.DiscoverJacksonNC.com](http://www.DiscoverJacksonNC.com).

### **Services Required**

1. **Strategic Planning** - The facilitation of organizational strategic objective development and creation of a tourism master plan with measurable achievable organizational goals for the next 3-5 years. (This is not a plan focused on leveraging our marketability, it is focused on organizational strategy and the role of the DMO).
  - Identify the resources (staff, funding, management systems, partnerships, etc.) necessary to achieve the identified goals.
  - Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by the JCTDA both inside the organization and out.
  - Review of current mission, vision, and goals.
  - Any other metrics your firm has used in similar situations.
  - Development of the overall Strategic Plan document which outlines the process, the goals and the reporting metrics.
  - The selected firm will provide consulting, research, report writing and presentation services to the JCTDA as part of the development of the Plan. The selected firm will present the final plan to the JCTDA Board of Directors and/or Community Leaders.
  - The firm will interview and/or survey the TDA board, county and municipal leaders, staff members and partners, and key stakeholders and influencers.
2. **Visitor Profile Research** – including segmentation beyond demographic data to help us better understand our visitors. The primary focus of the profile is leisure travel. The completed profile will show the typical visitor to the county, but also break out to show the profile of the visitor to the a) Sylva/Dillsboro area and b) Cashiers/Glenville/Sapphire area, and the commonalities/differences between those visitors.

3. **Gap Analysis and Research** - Identify and assess gaps in the tourism, sports, nature, and cultural infrastructure to include identification of potential new or enhanced tourism demand generators and strategies to enhance attractions, events or assets to drive demand. Research should take into account existing tourism assets in the area and what investments would drive the most demand to Jackson County. This work would incorporate not only primary research but also feedback from leaders, major stakeholders, visitors and residents. Final product should guide the TDA on what capital investments it should make to grow the tourism market in Jackson County.
4. **Seasonal analysis** - Analysis of off-peak seasons and recommendations on how to boost off-peak visitation.
5. **Estimate of annual visitation** to Jackson County and an estimate of total room nights sold with methodology documented.

#### **Budget**

The JCTDA is seeking highly competitive proposals for this project and has not identified a budget.

#### **Reserved rights**

JCTDA reserves, in its sole discretion, the following rights:

- (a) To exclusively determine whether any aspect of the proposal, or the proposal in its entirety satisfactorily meets the criteria established in this RFP;
- (b) To seek clarification from any respondent;
- (c) To solicit subsequent proposals from any respondent or respondents submitting a response;
- (d) To modify the scope of work to be considered for this project, and determine which respondents will be notified, in order to re-submit a revised proposal meeting the modified scope of work as determined by JCTDA; and
- (e) To reject any or all responses with or without cause.

In the event that this RFP is withdrawn by JCTDA, or JCTDA elects not to proceed for any reason, JCTDA shall incur no liability to any respondent for any costs for expenses incurred in connection with the preparation and submittal of the respondent's RFP response or any other submission prepared by respondent.

The respondent shall be required to execute a contract agreement prepared by JCTDA, which shall establish the rights and responsibilities of both parties in the final agreement. The contents of the resulting contract may differ from the terms set forth in the RFP.

### **Interpretation/Addenda**

No interpretation or clarification of the meaning of the proposal documents will be binding if made to any respondent orally. Every such request for clarification must be made by email, addressed to Nick Breedlove, [Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com](mailto:Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com), designated as the centralized point of contact for this RFP. Telephone inquiries or individual meetings are not permitted.

Written submissions to JCTDA requesting clarification or interpretation, JCTDA shall, if it deems necessary, provide clarification notices or addenda to said Request For Proposal on its website, and JCTDA will attempt to notify via email all prospective respondents who have provided their contact information to JCTDA.

### **Assistance**

The selected firm will receive assistance directly from the TDA's Executive Director in the form of documents, existing research, budgets, analytics and any items needed for the firm to complete a thorough assessment.

### **Collaborative RFP Response**

In an effort to provide the best services and fee schedule, respondents may submit a response partnering with another qualified firm to complete the work requested under this RFP. This may be done in an effort to both save costs and to expedite delivery of this plan. The lead firm should submit the RFP response and detail any collaboration and qualifications of partners along with the rationale for a collaborative approach. The final delivered product should come from the lead firm, incorporating any collaborative efforts.

### **Qualifications**

Minimum of three years of membership in statewide, regional and national tourism industry associations such as Destinations International (DI), Southeast Tourism Society, Inc. (STS), Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA), etc. Please list industry association memberships and years of membership for each.

### **Questions & Staff Contact**

Questions about this request for proposal should be sent to [Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com](mailto:Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com) on or before **June 1, 2018**. All questions will be consolidated, responded to in-kind, and copied to all respondents on or before **June 4, 2018**.

### **Selection Criteria**

Based on responses, JCTDA will choose the organization or individual best suited for this assignment based on experience and knowledge with Destination Management Organizations, Economic Development Agencies and the interplay between government and private sector organizations. The TDA will accept the most qualified and relevant proposal and not necessarily the lowest budgeted proposal.

### **Information Required**

**1 mailed, signed copy of the proposal and an e-mailed copy**

Please include in your proposal the following information:

- A brief history of your firm
- Credentials of individuals that will be assigned to the project
- A reference listing of similar organizations you have serviced
- Your written permission to contact your references
- Your methodology and approach for items 1-5.
- Your timeframe and project schedule for accomplishing items 1-5. Please indicate any benefits of undertaking or pairing the work on multiple items for greatest efficiency in time and resource allocation.
- Cost (including expenses and travel); breakdown of fees for items 1-5. Please quote items 1-5 individually.

### **Other requirements**

- Make periodic reports to the JCTDA Executive Director
- Minimum deliverables include a final on-site presentation of study results, along with a written report, and a presentation to the JCTDA/Community leadership. The report and all project materials must be submitted in hardcopy and by email.

### **Submission**

Please direct your proposal via USPS to Nick Breedlove, Executive Director, Jackson County TDA, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779. Please e-mail a digital copy to [Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com](mailto:Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com).

### **Deadline Date for RFP reply**

To be eligible for consideration, your proposal must be received by **2 p.m. June 17, 2018**. Extensions of time will not be granted. Respondents may e-mail the digital copy, but a printed copy by mail is required. Responses received after that time shall be deemed invalid, unqualified responses, shall not be considered, and shall be discarded. It shall be the sole responsibility of the respondent to have its proposal delivered to JCTDA administrative office for receipt on or before the stated time and date.


**Notification Date**

- Firms selected for an interview will be notified no later than **June 22, 2018**. Firms not selected will be notified before the same date.
- Interviews to be conducted by phone or in person on or around **July 18, 2018**
- The firm will be recommended to the full board for approval **August 15, 2018**. *In person attendance is recommended.*

We trust the information provided in this request is sufficient, but if further information is required, please limit your inquiries to the contact noted.

Thank you for your time, and we are looking forward to receiving your proposal.

Nick Breedlove



Jackson County TDA Executive Director