



Request for Proposal

Public Relations Services

Proposals Due by 3:00pm EST on June 30, 2023



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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****PLEASE DIRECT ANY AND ALL CORRESPONDENCE AND QUESTIONS IN WRITING TO HAYLEY PRINTZ ONLY.****

RFP OVERVIEW

Visit NC Smokies / Haywood County is a small destination in western North Carolina. Tourism promotion is carried out through the Visit NC Smokies brand name and website. The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) is a public authority established by enabling legislation at the state level and created to manage the proceeds of a 4% occupancy tax paid by visitors spending the night in paid accommodations throughout the county. The HCTDA drives county-wide economic development and supports hundreds of local small businesses by promoting travel, tourism and visitor services, sponsoring tourism-related events, and financing tourism-related capital projects that both make the destination more appealing to visitors and enhance our community for locals.

We are seeking proposals from a Public Relations firm with significant experience in travel and tourism, to plan, coordinate, implement and administer a national and regional public relations campaign for the Haywood County destination. The HCTDA is seeking a firm that will work with us as a partner; has experience managing highly recognized brand names; has excellent creative development skills; can provide high quality results in a cost-effective manner.

OVERVIEW OF HAYWOOD COUNTY

Home to Waynesville, Maggie Valley, Lake Junaluska, Canton and Clyde; Haywood County, North Carolina is located 20 miles west of Asheville and 20 minutes east of Cherokee, NC. Haywood County situated in the heart of Western North Carolina, surrounded by the ridges of the ancient Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains—is comprised of 546 scenic square miles of spectacular country, with beautiful Appalachian Mountains and valleys dotting the landscape. Twenty-five of its mountain peaks soar to elevations of at least 6,000 feet, making it one of the highest counties—with a mean elevation of 3,600 feet—east of the Rockies.

We are proud to promote an authentic experience that is as fresh and natural as the water that flows through our mountains. With over 200 years of history and heritage, Haywood County is home to a variety of homegrown traditions, activities, and offerings. We are the heart of real Appalachian culture and we pride ourselves on true experiences, none of this fabricated stuff. Food, Music, Heritage, Arts, and the Outdoors are our specialty.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS IN HAYWOOD COUNTY

The **Blue Ridge Parkway** is 469 miles long and runs through 29 counties in North Carolina and Virginia. It is America’s longest linear park and is named after the Blue Ridge Mountains, which are part of the Appalachian Mountain range. Haywood County boasts 46 scenic miles of some of the most beautiful and highest sections of the parkway.

Nestled in Haywood County, **Cataloochee Valley** was once a populous settlement and mountain community and is perhaps now best known for elk, which were reintroduced in the valley in 2001 after disappearing from North Carolina in the late 1700s because of over-hunting and loss of habitat. This section of the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** is a great place for outdoor activities like hiking, camping, and fishing.

Wheels Through Time Museum is home to the world’s premier collection of rare American motorcycles, memorabilia, and a distinct array of unique “one-off” American automobiles. Located in Maggie Valley the museum houses a collection of over 300 rare machines.

Historic Downtown Waynesville has a quaint, urban charm, perfect for walkable shopping in local boutiques and gift shops for artisan goods. For visitors interested in enjoying a unique, flavorful Appalachian experience, Waynesville offers a vibrant farm-to-table restaurant and craft beer scene. Within a short distance of downtown is **Frog Level**, an up and coming shopping district with eclectic antique stores, boutiques, a coffee shop and brewery.

Haywood County is the “best-kept secret” when it comes to golfing in the Southeast. At **Springdale Resort** you can tee off to the views of Cold Mountain. **Waynesville Inn & Golf Club** has reopened with major renovations. A mountain retreat rooted in golf’s past reimaged for the present and a renowned landmark whose legacy dates back to 1926. A great public course for a casual game,

players who take their game to the **Lake Junaluska Golf Course** enjoy beautiful views of the mountain-flanked lake and spectacular scenery and impeccable greens are highlights of a golf experience at **Maggie Valley Club**.

Chestnut Mountain is a 450-acre nature-based recreation park, located one mile east from Downtown Canton. The park consists of a Front country day-use area for picnicking and transitions into the Back country as you move deeper into the park where you'll find multi-use trails for both hikers and bikers. Chestnut Mountain is also home to **Berm Park**, an oasis for mountain bikers who are seeking a more active biking experience.

Haywood County is the ultimate playground for kids and kids at heart. In Waynesville experience up close animal encounters at **Winchester Creek Farm**. Here you have a chance to tour the farm and feed the alpacas, sheep, rams, goats and mini horses. You may also hear Penelope the pig play a mini piano! If you like larger animals, you can feed the bison at **Buffalo Creek Vacations** in Clyde.

The **Haywood Arts Regional Theatre (HART)** features live plays and performances that the whole family will enjoy. Haywood is also home to several local art galleries where you can view one-of-a-kind pieces from talented artists in the area.

Each Haywood County town has its own personality and charm, offering an authentic Appalachian experience. **Maggie Valley** is minutes away from an entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway and great Smoky Mountains National Park. **Waynesville** and **Canton** have main streets are lined with historic buildings, restaurants, family-owned stores and trendy shops. **Clyde** truly offers that hometown feel and is home to **Haywood Community College**.

For more information about Visit NC Smokies – Haywood County region, go to [VisitNCSmokies.com](https://www.visitncsmokies.com)

SUMMARY

Our goal is to promote Haywood County as a premiere overnight destination in Western North Carolina, and to implement programs and campaigns that help us work towards achieving this goal. To help achieve this objective, a Zip Code Destination Marketing Program was adopted to specifically highlight each of our towns. In addition to an ongoing County-wide communications program, there should also be a specifically outlined element that focuses on the key attractions of each town to promote overnight stays.

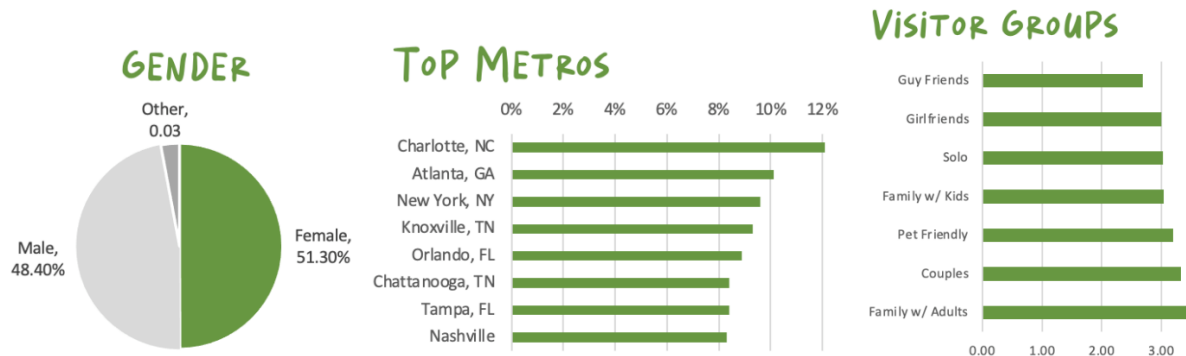
The annual destination marketing campaign directs all communication to go to Visitncsmokies.com for further information.

Strengthening the Visit NC Smokies destination marketing campaign calls for the development of a year-round communications program which will support an integrated marketing campaign encompassing outdoor recreation, vibrant art and festivals, local food scene, mountain towns, proximity to two national parks and the variety of accommodations.

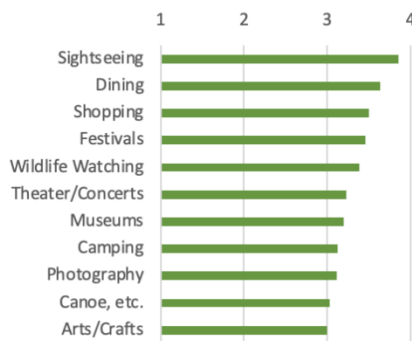
VISIT NC SMOKIES TARGET AUDIENCE

In 2022 the HCTDA in partnership with Texas A&M's Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences conducted quantitative research to determine specific target markets for Haywood County and determine target markets (clusters), based on the attributes that Haywood County has to offer.

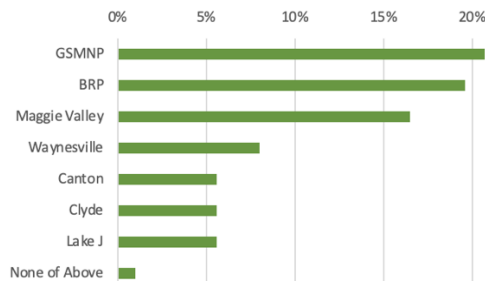
Respondents



DESIRES



PLACES VISITED



LIKE-IT-ALLS

n=188

Really love everything outdoors



NATURES

n=102

Love playing in nature and likely hugs it



PASSIVES

n=96

Like to view the outdoors, but not play in it



URBANITES

n=102

Really like cultural experiences



DISLIKERS

n=73

Not a fan of HC's attributes except outdoor sports



PROJECT DETAILS & SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Public Relations partner will collaborate closely with the in-house team and the Marketing Committee, utilizing [available destination research](#) and the [2023 Long-Term Haywood County Destination Plan](#) to propose and establish a communications-specific strategy and ultimately develop news worthy communications.

The purpose and intent of this Request for Proposal is to establish a contract with a qualified firm to provide Public Relations services for the Haywood County destination marketing programs. Development of a strategic plan for Public Relations that includes A-list media relations, dynamic press release writing and distribution and initiatives to support advertising campaigns that enhance the destination tourism brand is a key component of the scope.

Public Relations Services will include:

- Serving as the Public Relations Agency of Record to generate exposure for the Haywood County region
- Providing an experienced, senior management team member to lead the account
- Working closely in partnership with the in-house team, the Marketing Committee and any other possible agency partners to develop a strategic and targeted PR plan to reach the media and consumer, growing brand awareness for Haywood County
- Developing story angles and media stories that highlight the Haywood County region as a unique destination for the travel consumer
- Secure feature articles and broadcast placements in Visit NC Smokies primary visitor-origin and national markets
- Manage dynamic, proactive media outreach
- Create updated press releases and manage travel trend release opportunities
- Serving as primary point of contact managing reactive media inquiries and vetting potential journalists
- Securing travel media and press through targeted press trips, both individually and in groups, throughout the destination
- Monitor the efficacy of the Public Relations campaign by providing monthly progress reports
- Performing all necessary services related to the successful development and execution of said PR strategy and plan
- Providing client management through meetings, conference calls and presenting at stake holder sessions as needed

ANNUAL BUDGET

Haywood County TDA is funded solely by occupancy tax collections. Our complete marketing and advertising budget annually is approximately \$1,000,000 inclusive of agency fees, media buys, public relations cost, website development and maintenance, visitor guide production and community marketing grants. For this proposal, please assume a public relations budget in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 range.

FEE PROPOSAL

Please provide a breakdown of the agency fees as it related to the work above. Include proposed costs for all agency fees and a suggested budget for additional public relations expenses (hosting journalists, sending packages, activations and other PR-related items, etc.)

METRICS & REPORTING

Monthly reports should be received by the 15th of the succeeding month. Reports should include pitches, pitch topics, reach, earned media value, media tracking/follow – up, contact with media, etc.

PROPOSED TIMELINE (subject to change)

May 30, 2023	RFPs published
June 14, 2023	Questions Due
June 21, 2023	Responses to questions published
June 30, 2023	Proposals due
Week of August 7, 2023	Marketing Committee interviews finalists
August 23, 2023	Recommendation on agency to hire made to full BOD
September 1, 2023	Contract begins

GEOGRAPHY

There are no geographic restrictions upon the location of service providers allowed to submit responses. All service providers, however, must demonstrate their ability, recommended plan and commitment to serve the account, regardless of location. Any costs associated with travel to complete the project should be included in the cost proposal.

PUBLIC RECORD

Proposers should be aware that the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority is required by law to make its records available for public inspection. The Proposer, by submission of materials, acknowledges and agrees that the HCTDA may disclose these materials.

PROPOSAL PACKAGE

While also showcasing your style, experience and approach, please provide the following information in the order listed below:

- 1) Cover Page
- 2) Bidder Certification form
- 3) Business Profile- including location of main office and any branch offices, and year established
- 4) Brief summary of company background / history
- 5) Professional Tourism Experience (with a minimum of 2 recent tourism references)
- 6) Personnel (identify lead and support roles including relevant experience)
- 7) Agency Experience and Qualifications:
 - a. Please provide one or two examples of similar projects with other small destinations
 - b. Provide several samples of press releases / pitches demonstrating strong writing techniques and creativity.
 - c. What is the method by which you measure the results and successes of your Public Relations campaigns? Please provide examples.
 - d. Briefly describe your knowledge and understanding of Haywood County region's existing assets as they relate to tourism campaign programs. Cite examples that have great equity or potential for PR travel opportunities.
- 8) How you plan to collaborate with the incumbent Advertising Agency and integrate all efforts.
- 9) Total Cost (including a breakdown of services)

Additional Questions

- i. What does your agency offer that others do not?
- ii. How can your proposed plan help us stand out as a unique, must-visit western North Carolina mountain destination?

Your proposal will form an integral part of the contract.

SELECTION PROCESS & CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated by the HCTDA Executive Director, Marketing Manager and Marketing Committee, in consultation with the HCTDA Board of Directors. During the evaluation process, the HCTDA reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from those submitting proposals.

The HCTDA reserves the right to negotiate modifications to proposals that it deems acceptable, reject any and all proposals, and to waive minor irregularities in the procedures. Based on the number of responses, a short-list may be selected for virtual or in person interviews. The HCTDA may interview none, one or all agencies who submitted proposals.

Selection Process Step 1

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

Demonstrated previous experience developing and implementing strategic Public Relations campaigns in the Travel and Tourism sector	15
Quality, creativity and relevance of samples provided	15
Analysis and measurement of PR campaigns	10
Understanding of Haywood County area brand and use of existing research and information to develop presentation recommendations	25
Quality and experience of the personnel to be assigned to our project	10
Budget approach	20
Geographic location – distance from Haywood County and/or accessibility plan	5
TOTAL	100

Selection Process Step 2

At the HCTDA's discretion a small group of finalists may be selected for a virtual or in-person presentation. Tentative dates for the presentation are the August 7-11, 2023. HCTDA will not reimburse for any costs to travel for an in-person presentation. Further details will be shared with finalists.

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to Visit NC Smokies, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFP. The final selection decision rests with the Executive Director.

RESPONSE GUIDELINES

- Written proposals must be submitted on or before June 30, 2023, before 3:00 pm Eastern Standard Time for consideration. **Late proposals will not be accepted.**
- Supporting materials including USBs are welcome and should be referenced within the written presentation.
- Response must be dated and signed by principal of firm.
- Team must be available to present in-person, if required.

Please submit 8 printed copies of your proposal to:

Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant
Visit NC Smokies
91 N Lakeshore Dr. Suite 2
Lake Junaluska, NC 28745
828.944.0761

Please also submit one electronic version of your proposal via WeTransfer or other file-sharing means to: Hayley@visitncsmokies.com

BIDDER CERTIFICATION
(Bidder must sign and return with proposal)

I certify that this information is complete and correct to the best of my understanding and that I am authorized to submit this information on behalf of the company.

Authorized Signature

Date

Title

Print/Type Name

Print/Type Company Name