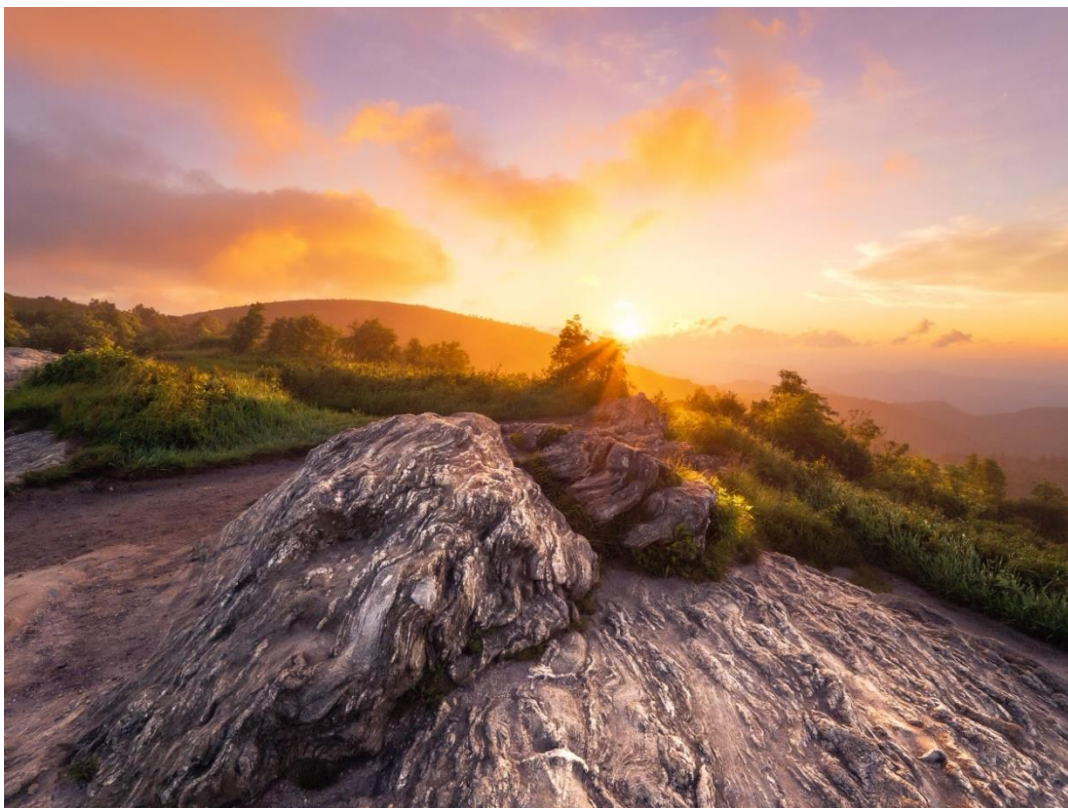




Request for Proposal

Website Design, Development, & Consolidation

Proposals due by 3:00 PM EST on July 23, 2025

Issued by: Visit Haywood / Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)

RFP Issue Date: May 28, 2025



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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

INTRODUCTION

Haywood County, located amongst the soaring peaks of Western North Carolina's Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains, invites qualified consultants to submit proposals for the design, development, and consolidation of a new destination website. The goal of the project is to leverage our unique cultural, historical, and natural resources to promote tourism, drive economic development, champion sustainability, and enhance our community for both visitors and residents.

The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA), operating as Visit Haywood, 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 staying overnight 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 enhance the destination for both visitors and residents. The selected vendor will engage in a contract with HCTDA.

The issuance of this RFP follows the recent completion of a Destination Master Plan and the launch of a refreshed Visit Haywood brand. This website redevelopment is a strategic next step to modernize our digital presence, better showcase our brand identity, and deliver a best-in-class user experience that inspires visitation and supports our long-term tourism and community development goals.

ABOUT VISIT HAYWOOD

Located at the intersection of the storied Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, Haywood County offers a landscape of rugged mountains, pristine rivers, and breathtaking scenic beauty. With the highest mean elevation east of the Mississippi River and a wealth of outdoor adventures, Haywood is an ideal destination located within a day's drive for much of the U.S. population.

Visit Haywood is the official destination marketing organization for Haywood County, North Carolina, representing the towns of Canton, Clyde, Lake Junaluska, Maggie Valley and Waynesville. Our role is to promote sustainable tourism, drive economic prosperity, and enhance the resident and visitor experience through strategic marketing, stewardship, and partnership development.

Mission: The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) drives community and economic prosperity as a strategic leader of the destination. By fostering collaboration and destination stewardship, we strive to make Haywood County an unrivaled place to live, work, and play.

Vision: Haywood County will be renowned as the authentic destination in the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, offering diverse, year-round experiences while preserving our natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

Haywood County offers a diverse range of visitor experiences. Outdoor recreation and public lands attract the largest number of visitors, with opportunities to expand further into water-based activities, cultural heritage tourism, and family-friendly attractions. Each of our five towns brings its own character and charm to the overall destination, enriching the visitor experience with authentic Appalachian culture, history, and hospitality.

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 highest and most beautiful sections of the Parkway.

Deep within Haywood County lies the iconic **Cataloochee Valley**, once a populous mountain settlement now best known for elk, which were reintroduced to the Valley in 2001, over 200 years after over-hunting and habitat loss wiped out their North Carolina population. Since the elk's reintroduction, this section of the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** has found new life as a highly sought-after location for outdoor activities like hiking, camping, fishing, and elk viewing.

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 350 rare machines.

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 **Historic Frog Level**, an up-and-coming shopping district with a working brewpub, riverfront coffee shop, music venue, and record store.

Haywood County is the “best-kept secret” when it comes to golfing in the Southeast. At **Springdale Resort**, you can tee off to views of the iconic Cold Mountain. **Waynesville Inn & Golf Club** has reopened with major renovations; a mountain retreat rooted in golf’s past reimagined 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. Spectacular scenery and impeccable greens are highlights of a golf experience at **Maggie Valley Club**. **Laurel Ridge Country Club** boasts a stunning championship golf course surrounded by panoramic mountain views.

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**, a must-visit spot for mountain bikers who are seeking a more active biking experience. In Waynesville, cyclists look forward to the opening of **Raccoon Creek Bike Park**, a dynamic amenity featuring a pump track, biking skills course, walking path, playground, picnic pavilions, and open space for outdoor recreation.

Haywood County is an exciting destination for both children and those young at heart. **Buffalo Creek Vacations** in Clyde and **Winchester Creek Farm** in Waynesville offer unforgettable animal encounters. These farms offer guided tours where you can get up close and personal with a variety of adorable animals. Feed alpacas, sheep, rams, goats, and mini horses for a memorable experience. At Buffalo Creek Vacations, you can also feed the large bison that roam the property or visit the model train depot for an added dose of fun.

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. Enriching the arts scene across the county, the **Haywood County Arts Council** operates a local gallery, hosts regular art exhibits, and offers a series of hands-on creation classes throughout the year.

Each town in Haywood County brings its own personality and charm, embodying the true essence of the Southern Appalachian experience. Situated directly along the Pigeon River, Canton and Clyde offer a host of outdoor recreation opportunities. You can enjoy fishing, swimming, tubing, snorkeling and more on this picturesque river that flows through both towns. **Maggie Valley** is minutes away from an entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making Haywood’s access to nature unparalleled. Historic buildings, restaurants, family-owned businesses, and trendy shops line the main streets of **Waynesville** and **Canton**. For those craving a touch of familiarity, **Clyde** offers a sincere hometown feel and is home to **Haywood Community College’s** public walking trail and disc golf course.

For more information about the Haywood County region, go to **[VisitHaywood.com](https://www.visitHaywood.com)**

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this project is to build a consolidated, modern, user-centered website that reflects the newly adopted Visit Haywood brand and supports strategic goals outlined in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan. This website should provide an exceptional experience for both visitors and local stakeholders, promote responsible tourism, and serve as a flexible, scalable tool for long-term destination marketing and development.

Each of the following strategic objectives should guide vendor proposals:

- **Unify Visit Haywood's Web Presence:** Combine VisitHaywood.com and HaywoodTDA.com into one cohesive, intuitive, and navigable platform serving both consumer and stakeholder audiences.
- **Showcase the New Brand Identity:** Ensure that all visual design, tone, and content reflect the newly launched Visit Haywood brand and convey the destination's charm, authenticity, and mountain spirit.
- **Elevate User Experience (UX):** Create an intuitive, mobile-first design that makes trip planning easy, visually inspires travel, and connects visitors with experiences, businesses, and events in minimal clicks.
- **Feature a Robust Event Calendar:** Include a flexible, filterable, and printable event calendar that allows users to discover what's happening across the county and submit events with administrative approval workflows.
- **Support Partner Portal & Submissions:** Develop a submission portal for events and business listings to facilitate partner contributions to site. Submissions should be delivered to info@visithaywood.com for approval before publishing on site pages.
- **Support Destination Stewardship & Sustainability:** Integrate messaging and features that promote responsible travel and community alignment as identified in the Destination Master Plan.
- **Drive Conversions and Partner Engagement:** Enhance partner visibility with business listings, trip-planning tools, event promotions, and direct referral links.
- **Implement Scalable, Open-Source Technology:** Utilize an open-source CMS (such as WordPress or Drupal) to ensure future scalability and reduce reliance on proprietary platforms.
- **Adopt SEO and Accessibility Best Practices:** Build a website that meets or exceeds WCAG 2.1 standards, loads quickly, and is optimized for organic search visibility.
- **Enable Research-Based Content Strategy:** Begin with a research-driven discovery phase to evaluate audience needs and inform site structure, content strategy, and tone.
- **Integrate Key Marketing Systems:** Seamlessly connect with Google Analytics 4, CRM platforms, email marketing tools, and explore integration with emerging technologies such as AI and voice search.
- **Empower Staff Independence:** Provide CMS training and documentation enabling Visit Haywood staff to manage site content and updates autonomously.
- **Ensure Ongoing Performance Monitoring:** Implement KPI tracking, SEO reporting, and site analytics to monitor performance and guide future optimizations.

The Scope of Work outlined in the next section translates these strategic objectives into specific deliverables and technical requirements.

SCOPE OF WORK

Vendors are expected to deliver a consolidated and strategically aligned website that fulfills the objectives stated above. The following tasks and deliverables define the core Scope of Work for this project:

Core deliverables include:

- **Website Consolidation:** Merge VisitHaywood.com and HaywoodTDA.com into one cohesive, user-centered platform.
- **Custom Responsive Design:** Create a fully responsive, mobile-first website that visually embodies the new Visit Haywood brand.
- **Robust Event Calendar:** Develop a flexible, filterable, and printable event calendar with user submission capabilities and administrative review workflows, including a “Featured Events” section.
- **User-Centric Navigation and UX:** Implement intuitive site architecture, streamlined navigation, and accessible content pathways to enhance user engagement.
- **Open-Source CMS Implementation:** Deploy an open-source content management system (e.g., WordPress or Drupal) that allows for flexible, independent content updates by internal staff.
- **SEO Strategy and Technical Optimization:** Ensure technical SEO foundations are built-in, including schema markup, metadata management, fast load speeds, and mobile-first indexing.
- **System Integrations:** Seamlessly integrate with Google Analytics 4 (GA4), CRM platforms, email marketing tools, and explore capabilities for future AI/voice search features.
- **Accessibility Compliance:** Meet or exceed WCAG 2.1 AA standards to provide an inclusive digital experience.
- **Multilingual and Future Scalability:** Ensure core infrastructure can accommodate multiple languages and future technology expansions (e.g., itinerary builder, AI tools).

PREFERRED FEATURES

In addition to the core deliverables, the following preferred features will enhance vendor proposals and support long-term scalability and performance:

- **SEO and Backlink Preservation:** Ensure the preservation of existing SEO value and backlinks from the current primary domains (VisitHaywood.com and HaywoodTDA.com), as well as a suite of active vanity URLs (GiftHaywood.com, FatBurgerMonth.com, ExperienceWaynesville.com, among others). Special attention must also be given to redirects associated with VisitNCSmokies.com, which was reskinned to VisitHaywood.com in October 2024. All redirects must remain functional and properly mapped to protect SEO equity and referral traffic.
- **Open-Source Development Platform:** Preference for platforms such as WordPress or Drupal, ensuring flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and future scalability.
- **Discovery Phase and Research Foundation:** Conduct a discovery and research phase to inform strategy, architecture, user journeys, and site content prioritization.
- **Content Migration and Archive Preservation:** Seamless migration of existing blog posts, press releases, evergreen content, and tourism resources from the two existing websites.
- **Visual Storytelling Enhancements:** Incorporate rich media tools compatible with UGC platforms like SnapSea and CrowdRiff, including photo galleries, video libraries, and immersive content formats to showcase Haywood County's assets.
- **Scalability for Future Features:** Plan for integration of additional functionalities over time such as an itinerary builder, trip planner tools, AI chatbot assistance, multilingual capabilities, and event ticketing integrations as needed.
- **Interactive Trail Directory:** Using information housed on the current website, develop a user-friendly, navigable directory of Haywood County's hiking, walking, biking, and multi-use trails with filtering options by activity type, difficulty, length, and location, as well as integration of maps, trailhead information, and key points of interest.

We welcome and encourage respondents to offer suggestions for additional functionalities, tools, or other enhancements that may not be explicitly outlined in this RFP but could add value to the project. Your expertise and creative input are highly appreciated and may be considered in the evaluation process.

PROJECT TIMELINE

May 28, 2025	RFP Published
June 11, 2025	Vendor Questions Due
June 25, 2025	Responses to Questions Published
July 23, 2025	Proposals Due
August 28, 2025	Marketing Committee Interviews Finalists
September 24, 2025	Recommendation on partner to hire made to full BOD
October 1, 2025	Contract Start Date

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.

CONFLICT(S) OF INTEREST

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

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.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposals should be clear, concise, and well-organized. Responses must be submitted in digital format following the order listed below and must not exceed 45 pages in total length, excluding covers and tabs. Proposals that do not follow the order or exceed the page limit may be deemed non-compliant.

Please include the following components:

1. **Cover Letter:** A brief summary highlighting your team's qualifications, tourism sector experience, and interest in partnering with Visit Haywood.
2. **Company Profile:** Overview of your company, years in operation, key personnel bios, office locations, and relevant core capabilities.
3. **Discovery and Research Approach:** Description of your proposed process for the research/discovery phase, including stakeholder engagement, audience research, and benchmarking.
4. **Creative and UX Strategy:** Outline your approach to designing a superior user experience (UX) and content strategy aligned with Visit Haywood's brand, goals, and audience needs.
5. **Portfolio of Relevant Work:** Provide at least two examples of previous tourism-related or destination websites, with live URLs, project descriptions, and a brief case study for each example demonstrating the goals, process, and measurable outcomes achieved.
6. **Proposed Timeline:** Include a detailed project timeline with major milestones, discovery to launch, and a target launch date.
7. **Comprehensive Budget Proposal:** Present a detailed budget broken down by major phases:
 - Research and Discovery
 - Website Design and Development
 - SEO/Content Migration
 - Hosting, Maintenance, and Ongoing Support
8. **References:** Supply at least two client references (preferably in tourism or destination marketing) with contact information.

RESPONSE GUIDELINES

- Proposals must be submitted on or before July 25, 2025, before 3:00 pm Eastern Standard Time for consideration. **Late proposals will not be accepted.**
- Response must be dated and signed by principal of firm.
- The team must be available to present in-person, if required.
- Please submit your proposal via Email, WeTransfer or another file-sharing means to:
Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant
Hayley@visithaywood.com

SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following weighted criteria:

- **Relevant Experience and Tourism Expertise (25%)**
Demonstrated success in developing websites for destination marketing organizations, tourism agencies, or related sectors.
- **Strategic and Creative Approach (25%)**
Quality of the proposed strategy, creative thinking, UX design plans, and ability to align with Visit Haywood's brand vision and objectives.
- **Technical Capabilities and UX Design (25%)**
Proficiency in developing scalable, accessible, SEO-optimized websites with strong mobile-first performance and CMS flexibility.
- **Budget Alignment and Value (15%)**
Clarity, thoroughness, and cost-effectiveness of the proposed budget relative to the proposed scope of work.
- **Professionalism, Organization, and Completeness (10%)**
Overall quality, clarity, adherence to submission guidelines, and responsiveness to the RFP requirements.

BUDGET

Vendors are expected to submit a detailed, phase-based budget as part of their proposal, as outlined in the Submission Requirements.

Visit Haywood has allocated a budget range of **\$100,000 to \$175,000** for this project. We invite you to submit your most competitive and value-optimized proposal within this range.

All submitted budgets will be evaluated by the Visit Haywood team based on the following criteria:

- Alignment with the outlined scope of work and project objectives
- Realistic and well-supported cost estimates
- Transparency and clarity in all budget line items
- Cost-effectiveness relative to proposed value

The proposed budget should address:

- Discovery and research activities
- Website design and development
- SEO transition and content migration
- Hosting, maintenance, and technical support (annualized if applicable)
- Ongoing SEO strategy and reporting

Visit Haywood operates under a public authority funding model using tourism occupancy tax revenues. Final budgets and contracts are subject to approval by the HCTDA Board of Directors. Vendors may be asked to provide additional clarifications or cost breakdowns during contract negotiation.

All fees should be presented as flat project amounts where possible, not hourly rates. If hourly billing is proposed for any elements (e.g., out-of-scope maintenance), specify clearly.

QUESTIONS & RFP SUBMISSION

Questions due: June 11, 2025

Submit proposals by: July 23, 2025, 5:00 PM EST (digital submission required)

Submit proposals and questions to:

Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant

Hayley@visithaywood.com

Thank you for your interest in partnering with Visit Haywood. We look forward to working with a creative, strategic, and technically skilled partner who will help us deliver a website that inspires visitors, supports our community, and reflects the unique spirit of Haywood County.