



Request for Proposal

Advertising Agency Services

Proposals Due by 3:00pm EST on March 31, 2021



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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Administrative Assistant

Visit Elizabeth City

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Elizabeth City, NC 27909

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****PLEASE DIRECT ANY AND ALL CORRESPONDENCE AND QUESTIONS IN WRITING TO SUSAN HARTLEY ONLY.****

RFP OVERVIEW

Elizabeth City / Pasquotank County is a small destination in northeastern North Carolina. Tourism promotion is carried out through the Visit Elizabeth City name and website. Visit Elizabeth City is funded by North Carolina legislation that created the oversight body: the Elizabeth City - Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority (EC-PC TDA). The purpose of EC-PC TDA is to increase travel to Pasquotank County generating revenues and improving the economy of the county.

We are seeking proposals from digital advertising firms with strong experience in travel and tourism. The selected agency must have expertise in marketing strategic planning with the ability to guide and assist with direct advertising and specifically to leverage digital skills for managing, measuring and optimizing digital campaigns including social, Google PPC and retargeting. The agency must be up to date on current trends in the travel industry, both strategic and tactical. The agency should be able to collaborate with our in-house team and our Public Relations partner to expand the impact of a fully integrated campaign while also focusing on the best return on the investment.

This Advertising RFP is being conducted simultaneously with a Public Relations Services RFP. Proposals may be submitted separately for each RFP or one combined proposal for both.

OVERVIEW OF ELIZABETH CITY & PASQUOTANK COUNTY

Just 50 minutes from Norfolk, Virginia and 50 minutes from the Outer Banks, North Carolina Elizabeth City is the economic, educational, health care and cultural hub for 16 counties in northeastern North Carolina. The city has a unique geographic location on the banks of the picturesque Pasquotank River, which connects to Albemarle Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. Named by Forbes as one of “Five Idyllic American Small Towns to Visit in 2021” and one of MSN’s “Small US Towns to Add to Your Travel Bucket List”, our charming, historic, and intriguing town gives both residents and visitors plenty to love.

A primary stop on the Intracoastal Waterway, Elizabeth City offers boaters a walkable downtown to visit, free 48-hours of docking and the Rose Buddies welcome reception – a hometown pride program that was started by two EC residents where visiting boaters are given roses and greeted with wine and cheese parties.

Known as the Harbor of Hospitality®, Elizabeth City is on the cusp of a revival. The United States Coast Guard calls the city home, as well as the annual Coast Guard Run and the North Carolina Potato Festival. The community features the most antebellum homes in the state as well as six National Register Historic Districts.

Major attractions / places in Elizabeth City & Pasquotank County:

The **Museum of the Albemarle** is part of the state’s suite of history museums and has exhibits that share the story of the founding of northeastern North Carolina. With a beautiful 7,000 square foot main gallery plus constantly changing exhibit and special events, the Museum of the Albemarle is a must-see attraction in Elizabeth City.

On the North Carolina-Virginia border and open year-round, **Dismal Swamp State Park** offers outdoor recreation opportunities like canoeing, hiking, kayaking and mountain biking. Bird watchers also flock to the park to get a glimpse of more than 200 species of birds.

The Lowry-Chesson Building was a hive for entertainment, arts, and culture at the turn of the 20th century during its era as the “Academy of Music” opera house. Now restored, it fills a similar role today as the **Arts of the Albemarle** including the second floor Maguire Theater, one of the few vaudeville theaters left in the state and the first-floor galleries are home to artwork from more than 220 local and regional artists.

Historic Downtown Elizabeth City welcomes residents and visitors alike and is quickly becoming a walkable hub of shopping, eclectic dining, and entertainment options all within a block of the harbor. Public art including the iconic Pailin’s Alley mural add beauty and a look at Elizabeth City’s culture. Frequent events including First Friday Art Walks and Third Thursday Jazz plus regular live music at local restaurants, Ghost Harbor Brewery & Taproom, and the new 2 Souls Wine Bar offer even more reasons to enjoy the downtown.

Elizabeth City's **Waterfront** is the heart of the city, and home to events large and small throughout the year. Full of green space and free parking, and with views of the Pasquotank River, the waterfront provides opportunities for all to enjoy.

The region is home to **three institutions of higher education**: Elizabeth City State University, the College of The Albemarle and Mid-Atlantic Christian University, all within close walking distance of downtown.

One of the U.S. **Coast Guard's** busiest bases, **Base Elizabeth City**, is home to five commands: Air Station Elizabeth City, Base Elizabeth City, Aviation Logistics Center, Aviation Technical Training Center and a small-boat station. The base is the Coast Guard's largest aviation facility and it is the largest employer in Northeastern North Carolina.

The **Elizabeth City Regional Airport** is full service, including competitive fuel prices, a mechanic on the field, 7200 foot runway and control tower. There are no commercial flights, but the airport is available for charter and private.

For more information about the Elizabeth City – Pasquotank region, go to [VisitElizabethCity.com](https://www.visitelizabethcity.com)

SUMMARY

Our goal is to promote the Elizabeth City region as an overnight destination, and to implement programs and campaigns that help us work towards achieving our mission and vision. The annual destination marketing campaign directs all communication to go to VisitElizabethCity.com for further information.

Vision Statement: Become a nationally-recognized, model historic riverfront destination that drives significant economic impact for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County and welcomes visitors with world class hospitality and experiences.

Mission Statement: Promote overnight visitation that drives economic impact through destination marketing and enhancement of the visitor experience in Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Strengthening the Visit Elizabeth City destination marketing campaign calls for the development of a year-round integrated strategic marketing campaign that dovetails with an annual communications plan, increasing awareness of the region, increasing intent to visit and ultimately increasing overnight stays and driving economic impact.

PROJECT DETAILS & SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Advertising Agency partner will collaborate closely with the in-house team and the Marketing Committee, utilizing [available destination research](#) , the [2019 Elizabeth City – Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority strategic plan](#) and our [annual Marketing Plan](#) to provide strategic advertising oversight and develop strong and consistent digital campaigns that integrate with all destination messaging and communications.

The full time Executive Director and Marketing & Communications Specialist are heavily involved in the strategic planning and day-to-day initiatives outlined in any given plan. They oversee all collateral creation, content development, asset collection, social media and website management.

The past twelve months have been very unique for the travel and tourism industry and the Elizabeth City region also experienced ups and downs. A recent analysis of the last four months of 2020 revealed the following trends:

- We were extremely fortunate in securing a variety of COVID-specific grant funding opportunities that allowed us to offset revenue loss and also test new and substantial marketing and advertising platforms.
- Overall, four months of constant messaging from a variety of channels (digital, OOH, retargeting, native advertising, social, public relations) drove significant awareness of the region and record traffic to our website – even while travel was down
- Paid media placements in combination with public relations made the marketing program noticeably stronger.
- Our recent efforts were rather disparate and not as cohesive or connected as they could be. (Much of this was a result of the requirements & strings from the grant funding we received, but this insight lends to us doing an even better job as we move forward!)

With a strong internal team in place and important learnings from 2020, Visit Elizabeth City is looking for an agency partnership to provide collaboration and the resources to link communications channels together to achieve goals synergistically.

Advertising Agency Services will include:

- Marketing Campaign Development –
 - Work closely with the Visit Elizabeth City staff and provide strategic insights that improve and enhance the annual marketing plan.
 - Together, develop a multi-faceted, inbound marketing campaign.
 - Content development is managed internally with creative suggestions and ideas that enhance the overall plan provided by the agency.
- Social Media –
 - Curate an advertising strategy that will retarget audiences as well as introduce new audiences to the destination.
 - Develop paid social campaigns that engage audiences on Facebook and Instagram.
 - Provide guidance to the Marketing & Communications Specialist regarding the evolution and best practice of the used platforms.
- Digital Advertising –
 - Create and execute a digital advertising campaign to promote tourism to the Elizabeth City region.
 - Agency shall recommend best platforms for future campaigns.
 - SEM is anticipated to be a key tactic and agency should reference their experience with SEM in their response
- Analysis & Reporting –
 - Ability to set up tracking in Google Analytics that align with goals and KPIs.
 - Provide analysis and reporting during and at the conclusion of marketing campaigns.
 - Make key recommendations during the advertising to allow for better performance and meet the goals of Visit Elizabeth City.
 - Recaps should include general recommendations for the next campaign.
- 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
- Providing client management through meetings, conference calls and presenting at stake holder sessions as needed

ANNUAL BUDGET

Visit Elizabeth City is funded solely by occupancy tax collections. Our complete marketing and advertising budget annually is approximately \$275,000 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 digital advertising budget in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000.

FEE PROPOSAL

Please provide a breakdown of the agency fees as it related to the work above. Include costs for each of the categories (digital, marketing strategy, account management) a total proposed monthly cost for the full scope of work outlined above or provide an alternative payment proposal.

PROPOSED TIMELINE (subject to change)

February 26, 2021	RFPs published
March 12, 2021	Questions Due
March 19, 2021	Responses to questions published
March 31, 2021	Proposals due
Week of April 12, 2021	Marketing Committee interviews finalists
April 22, 2021	Recommendation on agency(s) to hire made to full BOD
July 1, 2021	Contract begins

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 more case studies that demonstrate through the marketing campaign process how your agency achieved increases in intent to travel and increased visitation.
 - b. Provide several samples of executed digital campaigns including at least one social campaign and one SEM campaign with results.
 - c. Measuring campaigns for constant optimization and improving ROI is key; discuss and provide samples of your agency's analysis process.
 - d. Briefly describe your knowledge and understanding of the Elizabeth City region, the Visit Elizabeth City brand and how your agency would propose to work with us.
- 8) If your agency is solely responding to this Advertising RFP, please address how you plan to collaborate with the selected Public Relations firm 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 accomplish our objectives on a very tight budget?

Your proposal will form an integral part of the contract.

SELECTION PROCESS & CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated by the Visit Elizabeth City Executive Director and Marketing Committee, in consultation with the EC-PC TDA Board of Directors. During the evaluation process, Visit Elizabeth City reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from those submitting proposals.

Based on the number of responses, a short-list may be selected for telephone interviews. Visit Elizabeth City may interview none, one or all agencies who submitted proposals. The final selection decision rests with the Executive Director.

Visit Elizabeth City 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.

Visit Elizabeth City will award the contract based on the following selection criteria:

Demonstrated previous experience in the Travel and Tourism sector developing and implementing strategic advertising programs with strong emphasis on execution of digital campaigns.	20
Quality, creativity and relevance of samples provided	15
Analysis and measurement of advertising campaigns	10
Understanding of Visit Elizabeth City area brand and use of existing research and information to develop presentation recommendations	20
Quality and experience of the personnel to be assigned to our project	10
Budget approach	20
Geographic location – distance from Elizabeth City and/or accessibility plan	5
TOTAL	100

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.

RESPONSE GUIDELINES

- Written proposals must be submitted on or before March 31, 2021 before 3:00 pm Eastern Standard Time for consideration. **Late proposals cannot 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:

Susan Hartley, Administrative Assistant
Visit Elizabeth City
501 S Water Street
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252.335.5330

Please also submit one electronic version of your proposal via WeTransfer or other file-sharing means to:

Susan@VisitElizabethCity.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