



Request for Proposal

Public Relations Services

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



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CONTACT INFORMATION

Susan Hartley

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 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 Elizabeth City & Pasquotank County destination. Visit Elizabeth City 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.

This Public Relations RFP is being conducted simultaneously with an Advertising Agency 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 communications program which will support an integrated marketing campaign encompassing the unique history of the Elizabeth City destination in combination with its appeal as a charming, waterfront rural community.

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 [2019 Elizabeth City – Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority strategic 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 Visit Elizabeth City 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 Elizabeth City 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 Visit Elizabeth City
- Developing story angles and media stories that highlight the Elizabeth City region as a unique destination for the travel consumer
- Secure feature articles and broadcast placements in Visit Elizabeth City’s primary visitor-origin markets – Washington DC, northern Virginia, Hampton Roads VA, Greenville and Raleigh-Durham, NC, and all of North Carolina
- 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

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 public relations budget in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 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, etc.)

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 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 the Elizabeth City region's existing assets as they relate to tourism campaign programs. Cite examples that have great equity or potential for PR travel opportunities.
- 8) If your agency is solely responding to this Public Relations RFP, please address how you plan to collaborate with the selected 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 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 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 Visit Elizabeth City 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 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