



**Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau
Agency of Record
Requests for Expressions of Interest**

Introduction

Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau (Explore Asheville) is undertaking an agency selection process that will begin later this month. As our destination grows, our investment in advertising is keeping pace and it's time for us to evaluate potential agency relationships.

As part of the initial stage, our team would like to identify agencies that are experienced in the destination space and interested in representing the Asheville destination brand.

First, let us introduce ourselves. We are a committed, passionate staff of 25, including a marketing team of ten, who are committed to creating a vibrant and sustainable tourism economy by attracting overnight visitors and expanding the customer base for local businesses. Our team works on behalf of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) to support local tourism partners including attractions, lodging, retail, recreation and the arts. We value collaboration, strategic thinking based on thoughtful analysis, and partners who strive to understand the complexities and nuances of our visitor product and destination. Our marketing staff is experienced in launching award-winning initiatives and integrated marketing efforts. Asheville's slate of high profile accolades can be attributed, in part, to the expansive work of our in-house PR team which annually generates more than 3,000 media placements and an editorial reach of nearly five billion. The team works closely with our in-house Web manager and a talented duo that produces creative content and manages a proactive social media effort that leverages more than 350,000 followers and capitalizes on the nearly 4.5 million yearly web sessions on ExploreAsheville.com

More information about Explore Asheville can be found on our industry partner website at <https://www.ashevillecvb.com/>.

We'd like to learn more about potential agency partners and want to connect with like-minded teams.

The Account

Asheville, North Carolina is a premier destination located in the highest mountain peaks in the East. Home to the Blue Ridge Parkway, America's scenic roadway, and Biltmore Estate, the Vanderbilt castle in the mountains, Asheville and the surrounding communities are known for its artsy culture, expansive outdoor opportunities, and a renowned food and beer culture. Asheville's vibrant downtown has become a success

story of transitioning a historic city center into a hip, bustling place-to-be with a distinctive style. Its locavore culinary culture is sprinkled with outdoor cafés and rooftop bars and a thriving craft beer scene. Independently owned shops and art galleries are ubiquitous and its 20-year-old drum circle, live music venues, and talented buskers are at the heart of a sound that is grounded in a rich music legacy.

Asheville's accolades span the gamut from Lonely Planet calling Asheville the number one best destination in the US to National Geographic's shout out to our music scene, from our four-time top ranking as Beer City, USA to Global Traveler listing Asheville as its #1 Foodie Destination. Just this month, Travel + Leisure included Asheville in its World's Best list, naming it as one of its top 15 cities in the U.S.

The Client

Explore Asheville works under the oversight of its board, the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), to execute an extensive strategic marketing and sales program to generate overnight lodging visits.

The destination brand has been built through a significant investment in marketing over the past 35 years. In that time, the destination marketing organization budget has grown to more than \$17 million. The **net** media budget for FY 18-19 is more than \$10 million. Explore Asheville promotes the destination through out-of-market advertising and other marketing, public relations and sales initiatives, resulting in approximately 3.8 million overnight leisure visitors each year and a tourism economy that generates nearly \$3 billion of annual economic activity in Buncombe County. The success of the tourism sector has been a big part of the economic vitality of Asheville, fostering new businesses of all kinds — including many new hotels that will generate additional customers, jobs, and millions of dollars of property and sales taxes.

The Process

A Request for Qualifications will be sent no later than August 10 and will be due by August 27. Details are forthcoming. We are particularly interested in reading about case studies that are in alignment with our objectives. We want to understand the agency's thought-process, data insights, and how you judged success or what you learned from failures. We are particularly interested in learning more about your digital expertise, how you hold vendors accountable in an era of ad fraud, and how you effectively used digital to break through the clutter to achieve results that furthered your clients' goals. Explore Asheville prides itself on keeping pace with changes in technology and trends. We will want to understand how your agency does the same and the mechanisms you deploy to ensure your team is forward-thinking.

We are excited to get to know our prospective agency partner. We'd like to meet our agency finalists on their turf, so we get to know the team; specifically, the people who would work on our account who will be our everyday collaborators. We want to be immersed in your culture and, in turn, we will invite some of you to visit us in Asheville to sit down with our very talented and experienced team of destination marketers. As an expression of our seriousness about wanting to engage in-person and spend meaningful time with the agency team, a travel stipend will be provided to agency finalists. **The development of spec creative will not be a part of the agency review process.**

During this second phase of the process, we will encourage you to interact with key staff leaders. We hope this ongoing engagement and interaction will allow us to get to know you further and understand your thought process and strategic thinking. At the same time, we trust this dialogue will lead to a better understanding of our approach to destination opportunities and challenges as well as establish our working style and expectations. Our aim is to have finalized our agency-of-record choice by the end of November.

This review is not contractually mandated, and the incumbent agency of record will be participating.

Our Ideal Agency Partner

Explore Asheville is looking for a partner agency that can support us in generating overnight visitation demand through exceptional advertising. The ideal agency for us will be collaborators who can marry the strategic with the creative, the data with decision-making. We love innovation and laud the power of creativity, but we also relish strategic insights and strong analytical capabilities that lead to campaigns and integrated marketing efforts that are notable for attributable goal conversions and driving visitation.

The scope of work does not include public relations, social media engagement, the Explore Asheville website, or the visitor guide. Explore Asheville executes a regular program of market research, but the agency partner may want to recommend additional research initiatives.

We know there are many incredible agencies doing distinguished work worthy of consideration. We will release a Request for Qualifications in the coming weeks that outline details about our ideal agency partner and provide additional insight into our opportunities and challenges. To streamline the process and to ensure transparency of our agency needs, it's important that we outline our foundational needs in a strategic partner:

- Agency must have demonstrated experience in managing accounts with large media budgets in excess of \$8 to \$10 million.
- Compensation for services should be based on a retainer/net media structure.
- Explore Asheville operates under specific financial policies that require vendor invoices accompany agency invoices. Agencies who participate in the process should indicate their willingness and ability to conform to a policy that only allows payment if media vendor invoice is attached to agency invoice.
 - Buncombe County Finance processes invoices from Explore Asheville in real-time upon receipt. The normal process time from the receipt of the invoice to issuing payment is generally within a few days.
- Agency destination client experience within the last five years is a consideration.
- Explore Asheville has longstanding relationships with many destinations throughout the Southeast. We appreciate and promote the strong working and convivial destination relationships that abound throughout our industry and

especially the Southeast. At the same time, we believe marketing partnerships work best when competitive destinations are not represented by the same agency.

- Representation of DMOs in our competitive set, whether as an agency of record, or via an ongoing history of project work, would be viewed as conflicts by our organization and board. Our competitive set includes Charleston, SC, Savannah, GA, Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge, Sevierville in TN and Greenville, SC as well as NC mountain destinations.

If you are interested in participating in the agency evaluation process, please let us know by providing a very brief response that outlines how your agency aligns with our foundational needs outlined in the bullet-pointed items above. Questions from interested agencies will not be taken at this time but will be solicited later.