

**EXPLORE  
ASHEVILLE**

POWERED BY  
**Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority**



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

ExploreAsheville.com Website Redesign for  
Explore Asheville powered by the Buncombe County  
Tourism Development Authority  
Issued August 9, 2023

Explore Asheville | Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority  
27 College Place | Suite 200 | Asheville, NC 28801

## INTRODUCTION

The Buncombe County (NC) Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) under the auspices of Explore Asheville is seeking proposals from qualified vendors for a redesign of our website ExploreAsheville.com. The website currently attracts 5 million+ users and 7 million+ site sessions per year, serving as a vital platform for promoting travel and tourism in our area. Our goal is to create a more intuitive, engaging, and effective web presence that delivers an unparalleled user experience, inspires potential visitors, and ultimately drives balanced and sustainable tourism growth. We're looking for a collaborative partner who can work with us to build a site that incorporates quickly changing technology that can adapt into the future (3-5 years).

## ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Explore Asheville is the official destination marketing and management organization for Asheville and Buncombe County.

Explore Asheville's Strategic Imperatives:

- Delivering balanced and sustained growth
- Encouraging safe and responsible travel
- Engaging and inviting more diverse audiences
- Promoting and supporting Asheville's creative spirit

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) is an 11-person board charged with the fiduciary oversight of the tourism marketing and sales efforts of the Asheville area. The work of the BCTDA is carried out by the professional staff of the nonprofit arm known as Explore Asheville. The board oversees Explore Asheville in managing the execution of marketing and sales strategies and tactics, as well as the destination website. ExploreAsheville.com is Explore Asheville's official tourism website. Key pages of the ExploreAsheville.com site include Things to Do, Places to Stay, Event Calendar, Outdoor Adventures and Food & Drink. Our organization collaborates with local businesses, attractions, and event organizers to showcase the rich history, culture, and experiences of our region.

## PROJECT GOALS

We are seeking a vendor or vendors who can help us to improve the look and usability of our website to meet the needs of our diverse audiences. Project goals include:

- Deliver a website that will:
  1. Inspire more overnight stays to Buncombe County in a way that delivers balanced and sustained growth and engages and invites more diverse audiences.
  2. Help visitors plan engaging itineraries for their trip that encourage safe and responsible travel.

3. Promote and support Asheville's creative spirit by providing more exposure to our 1,200+ tourism partners.
- Integrate and streamline content from our separate industry partner website (ashevillecvb.com) into the new exploreasheville.com, including About Us, BCTDA, and Partner Info.
  - Improve site architecture for enhanced navigation and user experience.
  - Design a visually consistent and unified site that aligns with our brand identity and inspires visitation.
  - Develop mobile-first designs that are also responsive to users on different devices.
  - Develop a scalable website that can grow and evolve with our needs and ever-changing technology.
  - Implement SEO best practices to increase our visibility.
  - Enhance accessibility to meet ADA compliance.
  - Integrate with our current CRM and other key systems.
  - Provide training for our team to update content and perform basic site maintenance.
  - Provide ongoing support after the launch of the website.

## TARGET AUDIENCE & END USERS

Asheville visitors love to experience different cultures and activities, eat local fare, explore the outdoors and meet new people. They seek atmospheres where they are comfortable being themselves.

ExploreAsheville.com's marketing strategy—which influences site content, presentation, and functionality—focuses primarily on the following types of customers:

### Visitor-Facing Audiences\*

- Active Adventurers  
25-49  
91% have children in HH
- Timeless Travelers  
55-74  
15% have children in HH
- Thoughtful Families  
35-54  
95% have children in HH
- Distinctive Explorers  
40-59  
75% have children in HH

\* We have visitor-facing audiences segmented and can share that upon submission of intent to bid.

### Community-Facing Audiences

- Local Residents
- Partners and Stakeholders

### SCOPE OF WORK

Interested vendors should submit a proposal that includes the following services:

#### Design

- Website strategy and planning
  - Provide documented project deliverables and accompanying milestones
  - Schedule regular status update meetings over Zoom/screen share that include comps, demos, etc. to illustrate progress
  - Analyze the results of our recent website usability study and use findings to inform strategy
  - Conduct stakeholder meetings with Explore Asheville departments and with local industry partners during discovery phase to inform strategy and planning
  - Produce wireframes and interactive prototypes to communicate how the new site will look and feel
- Content strategy and information architecture
  - Streamline navigational menu
  - Content strategy that ensures that our four strategic imperatives (see above) are present throughout the website
  - Required data collections and/or page templates include:
    - 1,400 blog posts – [example](#)
    - 200 press releases and PR articles – [example](#)
    - 500 evergreen stories – [example](#)
    - 200 category or topic pages – [example 1](#), [example 2](#), [example 3](#), [example 4](#)
    - 10 advertising landing pages – [example](#)
    - 1,200 tourism partner listings – [example](#)
    - 500 leisure event listings – [example](#)
    - 50 discount and special offer listings – [example](#)
    - 50 hiking trails – [example](#)
    - 90 walking tour points of interest – [example 1](#), [example 2](#)
    - 20 itineraries – [example](#)
    - 35 staff contacts/bios – [example](#)
    - 50 local goods listings – [example](#)

- 100 meeting microsites – [example](#)
  - 50+ industry partner news articles – [example](#)
  - 25+ industry partner event listings – [example](#)
  - 25+ industry partner content pages – [example](#)
- Improve user experience and user interface design for page sections and widgets including, but not limited to:
  - Page header and footer with nav menu
  - Calls to action sections including email newsletter and visitor guide signup
  - CTA buttons and mouseover states
  - Hotel booking widget with date selector input
  - Content widgets to display collection data in a variety of styles including grid block, list, slider, hero image, hero video, etc.
  - Neighborhood map for promoting dispersal of visitors throughout Buncombe County
  - Filters for data collection by attributes (ex. users should be able to sort hotel partner listings by pet-friendly, group-friendly, etc.)
- Develop custom icons for use across the website

## Implementation

- Custom website development
  - Mobile-first design
- Third party integrations
  - Please see partnerships/integrations below
- Search engine optimization
  - Industry best practices to optimize all content for search engines
  - Image optimizations for improved page speed and decreased download times
  - 1:1 redirects for legacy URLs
- Website accessibility (ADA) compliance
  - Industry best practices for alt text, color contrast, font size and spacing and link highlighting for visually impaired visitors
- Training and support

## CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS/INTEGRATIONS

Explore Asheville has existing partnerships and integrations as outlined in the table below. Design and development efforts must solve for integrations with the following partners or suggest an alternative.

SYSTEM/PRODUCT/ROLE	CURRENT PROVIDER	STATUS
CMS	Simpleview	Prefer Simpleview to coordinate with CRM system, but open to other options; provide recommendation and rationale if different
CRM	Simpleview	Required integration for partner listings, event listings and coupon/offer listings
Booking Engine	aRes	We require a booking engine, but are not required to use our current provider; provide recommendation and rationale if different
Event Calendar	Simpleview Listing	Considering evaluating options for a local event list feed that pulls data into our CRM
Email Marketing	Act-On/Simpleview	Prefer Act-On to coordinate with CRM system; Provide recommendation and rationale if different
SEO	Internal	Part of this RFP
SEM	MMGY	Preferred vendor
Personalization	Bound360	Preferred vendor
Itinerary building/mapping	Visit Widget	Preferred vendor (iframe or embed integration)
User generated content galleries	Crowdriff	Preferred vendor (iframe or embed integration)
Weather/temp	Simpleview	Provide recommendation
Web Metrics	Google Analytics 4	Preferred vendor
Partner sponsored ads	Destination Travel Network	Preferred vendor

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Please include in your proposal:

- Company Information
  - Your organization's background and history
- Sample Sites
  - Portfolio showcasing past projects, ideally within the travel industry, with links to example sites
    - Clearly identify any client relationships that could potentially be considered a conflict of interest
- Team Information
  - List of team members who will work on the project, along with their qualifications
  - Resumes of management or key personnel, including any tourism-related experience
- Proposed project approach and methodology
  - An assessment of the current strengths and weaknesses of ExploreAsheville.com
  - A description of your plan to address the project goals detailed above
  - An outline of technology information and specs required for your solution
  - Examples of early concepts for ExploreAsheville.com
- Detailed timeline with key milestones and deliverables
- Detailed pricing structure
  - Estimate costs to finish project
  - Break out costs associated with research, project management, design, development, implementation, maintenance, training, etc.
  - List any potential software license fees you expect may be incurred during design or development
  - Outline your proposed billing process (hourly vs. project fee, etc.)
  - Other: Please identify where there will be other expenses (travel, consulting fees, etc.) needed to complete this project
- References from past clients
  - Please provide at least three, preferably from the travel sector

## SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on vendor experience and qualifications and the quality and relevance of the vendor portfolio. Vendors must demonstrate qualified experience with developing enterprise-level websites to be considered. Preference will be given to vendors with experience in destination marketing websites as well as those offering solutions with our preferred content management system, Simpleview CMS. Other content management systems including Webflow Enterprise, Drupal and WordPress may be considered.

Consideration may be given to vendors who can only offer a portion of the project goals. For example, Explore Asheville may choose one vendor for information architecture, user experience design and web design, another for accessibility compliance and another for website implementation and ongoing support contract.

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>MAX. POINTS</b>
Strategic approach	25
Creative approach (ground-breaking creativity & execution)	25
Demonstrated Results with Relevant Scope, Scale & Segmentation Efforts (within the destination marketing space)	20
Qualifications of Proposed Agency & Project Team (strengths & weaknesses, references)	15
Cost-Effectiveness	15
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>100</b>



## TIMELINE

Please submit your proposal by September 9, 2023. We aim to select a vendor by October 9, 2023, and begin the project by October 23, 2023.

## WARRANTIES

Agency represents and warrants that it has full power and authority to enter into and fully perform this Agreement, and that no services or material furnished hereunder will in any way infringe upon or violate the rights of any third party, including without limitation rights of patent, trade secret, trademark, copyright, or privacy.

BCTDA represents and warrants that it has full power and authority to enter into and fully perform this Agreement, that any information about its products and services furnished to Agency will be accurate and complete, and that no services or material furnished to Agency hereunder will in any way infringe upon or violate the rights of any third party, including without limitation rights of patent, trade secret, trademark, copyright, or privacy.

## PROCESS

All questions and proposals should be directed via email to:

Elizabeth White, Web Manager  
[ewhite@exploreasheville.com](mailto:ewhite@exploreasheville.com)

Please submit questions in writing via email by EOB August 23, 2023, and all answers will be posted online by August 30, 2023.

Upon selection, the Explore Asheville team will schedule a kick-off/discovery call with the vendor to share brand guidelines as well as the results of a recent usability study conducted by Destination Analysts, including recorded interviews, online survey and website heatmapping. The team will also share examples of comparable sites and site elements to guide the design process and answer any outstanding questions.

**ATTACHMENT 1**

**Notice of Intent to Bid**

**Instructions:**

Notice of Intent to Bid (Attachment 1) must be received by August 16, 2023 (due by 5:00 p.m. EST).

The notice shall be sent by email to [ewhite@exploreasheville.com](mailto:ewhite@exploreasheville.com). The Notice of Intent to Bid is nonbinding; however, it ensures the receipt of all addenda related to this RFP. Proposals will be accepted only from applicants who submitted a timely Notice of Intent to Bid.

**Send to:**

Explore Asheville  
C/O Elizabeth White  
27 College Place  
Asheville, NC 28801  
Email: [ewhite@exploreasheville.com](mailto:ewhite@exploreasheville.com)

Name of Bidder / Company:
Contact Person:
Mailing Address:
Telephone:
Email Address:
Signature: