



**Request for Proposal  
Destination Branding Services**

*Proposals Due by 3:00pm EST on September 26, 2023*



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## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **Hayley Printz**

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**\*\*Please direct any and all correspondence and questions in writing to Hayley Printz only.\*\***

## RFP OVERVIEW

Visit NC Smokies / Haywood County is a small destination in western North Carolina. Tourism promotion is carried out through the Visit NC Smokies brand name and website. The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) 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 spending the night 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 both make the destination more appealing to visitors and enhance our community for locals.

For the purposes of this RFP, HCTDA/ Visit NC Smokies is seeking a qualified agency to undertake a brand assessment and develop a positioning and messaging platform. The goal is to elevate Haywood County's stature as a top-tier destination for both visitors and residents, building equity and interest in Haywood County for years to come.

Qualified candidates should demonstrate a history of successful brand development across diverse destinations, both regionally and nationally. Submitted case studies should spotlight destination branding experience and clarify whether they represent past or existing relationships. While supplementary examples showcasing the broader agency team's experience are welcome, they should be distinctly noted as such.

We are concurrently issuing two RFPs: one for the development of a Tourism Master Plan and the other for Destination Branding Services. Consultants are invited to submit proposals for either individual RFP, both, or may opt to collaborate with another agency for a joint proposal. We anticipate potential economies of scale given the overlapping nature of baseline research across these projects. We encourage consultants to consider these synergies when crafting their responses.

## OVERVIEW OF HAYWOOD COUNTY

Home to Waynesville, Maggie Valley, Lake Junaluska, Canton and Clyde; Haywood County, North Carolina is located 20 miles west of Asheville and 20 minutes east of Cherokee, NC. Situated in the heart of Western North Carolina and surrounded by the ridges of the ancient Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains, Haywood County is comprised of 546 scenic square miles of spectacular country, with beautiful Appalachian Mountains and valleys dotting the landscape. Twenty-five of its mountain peaks soar to elevations of at least 6,000 feet, making it one of the highest counties—with a mean elevation of 3,600 feet—east of the Rockies.

We are proud to promote an authentic experience that is as fresh and natural as the water that flows through our mountains. With over 200 years of history and heritage, Haywood County is home to a variety of homegrown traditions, activities, and offerings. We are the heart of real Appalachian culture and we pride ourselves on true, authentic experiences. Food, Music, Heritage, Arts, and the Outdoors are our specialty.

Of particular interest for this project, our legislation mandates that 1% of the occupancy tax collected must be used to promote the specific zip code from which it was collected. This requirement has led to disjointed marketing efforts and inconsistent messaging about Haywood County as a tourism destination. We need a more coordinated, county-wide approach to marketing and branding that maintains the distinct character of each zip code while presenting a unified vision of Haywood County.

## 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 most beautiful and highest sections of the parkway.

Nestled in Haywood County, **Cataloochee Valley** was once a populous settlement and mountain community and is perhaps now best known for elk, which were reintroduced in the valley in 2001 after disappearing from North Carolina in the late 1700s because of over-hunting and loss of habitat. This section of the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** is a great place for outdoor activities like hiking, camping, and fishing.

**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 300 rare machines.

**Historic 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 **Frog Level**, an up and coming shopping district with eclectic antique stores, boutiques, a coffee shop and brewery.

Haywood County is the "best-kept secret" when it comes to golfing in the Southeast. At **Springdale Resort** you can tee off to the views of 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 and spectacular scenery and impeccable greens are highlights of a golf experience at **Maggie Valley Club**.

**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**, an oasis for mountain bikers who are seeking a more active biking experience.

Haywood County is the ultimate playground for kids and kids at heart. In Waynesville, experience up close animal encounters at **Winchester Creek Farm**. Here you have a chance to tour the farm and feed the alpacas, sheep, rams, goats and mini horses. You may also hear Penelope the pig play a mini piano! **Buffalo Creek Vacations** on Trinity Bison Ranch offers an unforgettable family adventure in Clyde. Get up close and personal with American Bison, hand-feed mini-horses and donkeys, explore a model train layout, play paintball, and enjoy a leisurely hike with scenic views and a custom-made playground.

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.

Each Haywood County town has its own personality and charm, offering an authentic Appalachian experience. **Lake Junaluska** offers a serene and picturesque lakeside retreat, providing a wide range of recreational activities, spiritual retreats, and natural beauty. **Maggie Valley** is minutes away from an entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway and great Smoky Mountains National Park. **Waynesville** and **Canton** have main streets lined with historic buildings, restaurants, family-owned stores and trendy shops. **Clyde** truly offers that hometown feel and is home to **Haywood Community College**.

For more information about the Visit NC Smokies – Haywood County region, go to [VisitNCsmokies.com](http://VisitNCsmokies.com)

### PROJECT DETAILS & SCOPE OF WORK

In collaboration with our in-house team and Marketing Committee, the selected branding partner will help devise a comprehensive destination brand for Haywood County. This project must leverage an inclusive and rigorous methodology, with the end goal extending beyond the final deliverable. The process must sketch a roadmap for the destination to live the brand after the selected firm completes its work. This effort must be about more than a logo—it must result in long-term, positive benefits across all of Haywood County.

The purpose and intent of this Request for Proposal is to develop an authentic destination brand that connects with different target audiences, drives new economic activity, and supports new and existing businesses in Haywood County. Our aspiration is to establish a clear brand promise highlighting Haywood's distinctiveness from other mountain communities and to forge a brand strategy that serves as a beacon for future marketing initiatives. Given the legislative-induced fragmentation in our current marketing, a branding plan based on research will help streamline our messaging, ensuring consistency, clarity, and a powerful brand image that resonates with potential visitors and unites our community.

The **scope of work** for this assignment will include, but is not limited to:

- Evaluate the current perceptions of Haywood County as a destination.
- Identify the emotional brand drivers for Haywood County for its different target audiences.
- Outline how stakeholders will be involved in the process, and how they should continue to be engaged once this project is concluded.
- Conduct a brand audit to discover strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This process must include meetings with stakeholders, visitors and tourism partners plus a competitive analysis.
- Create a sustainable and authentic destination brand promise for Haywood County.
- Develop visual and verbal brand identity options, including naming, logos, taglines, brand purpose, mission and values, messaging, supporting graphics, typography, and colors.
- Develop a destination brand architecture that incorporates a destination master brand and outlines how communities within the destination fit under a potential brand umbrella.
- Create unified branding and promotion to centralize efforts and speak to the entirety of Haywood County, while respecting local nuances.
- Detail research methodologies for evaluating brand identity options.
- Assess how the new brand fits within a competitive set of destinations.
- Determine strategies for bringing the new brand to life within the work of Haywood County Tourism Development Authority and other organizations which have an impact upon how the destination is perceived.
- Recommend appropriate strategies and tactics for introducing the brand to stakeholders and establishing it as a permanent way of thinking about the destination.
- Suggest metrics for measuring the impact of the brand and tracking results.
- Produce a brand standards manual, including brand identity (naming, logos, supporting graphics, colors, typography), brand purpose, mission and values, brand messaging and positioning (including brand voice and language), brand implementation and asset collection (including photography style, videography style, and design examples for using brand identity in advertising in print and digital applications), examples of brand standards violations, and other recommendations as the selected firm sees as appropriate.

**Other Considerations:**

- This RFP does not represent a solicitation for traditional advertising and other ongoing marketing services. However, the selected firm should showcase potential executions of the brand in advertising and other promotional avenues.

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Late Proposals will not be considered. The person(s) authorized to sign on behalf of the company and to bind the company to statements made in response to this RFP must sign the Bidder Certification Form provided herein. Unsigned Proposals will be declared disqualified.

Each proposal should adhere to the following format and incorporate the specified information:

1. **Title and Contact Information:** The title page should include your firm's name, address, phone number, primary contact person, and their email address.
2. **Agency Overview:** Provide a concise history and description of your agency/consultancy, highlighting any specialization in destination branding.
3. **Relevant Experience:** Briefly describe prior projects that align with destination branding. Please include links to or copies of relevant branding projects.
4. **Team Composition:** Provide names, titles, and brief CVs for each team member intended to work on this project. Specify their roles and responsibilities concerning this project.
5. **Availability and Office Location:** State the availability of your team to start and complete the project. Also, provide the primary office location from which the project will be managed.
6. **References:** List at least three (3) references from previous clients, preferably regional destination management organizations, with whom you've worked on similar branding projects. Include the name, address, phone number, and email for each reference.
7. **Conflict of Interest Declaration:** Confirm that neither your firm nor any proposed sub-consultants have any conflicts of interest in undertaking this project.
8. **Understanding of the Project:** Provide a brief outline showcasing your grasp of the scope and objectives of the RFP.
9. **Methodology and Approach:** Detail the methods and strategies you intend to employ to fulfill the scope of work. This should include your plans for research, stakeholder engagement, brand development, and any other relevant processes.
10. **Project Timeline:** Offer a tentative timeline detailing the phases of the project, including significant milestones and deliverables.
11. **Budget Breakdown:** Offer a line-by-line breakdown of costs associated with the project. This should cover research, personnel, materials, and any other anticipated expenses.
12. **Value Proposition:** Suggest any enhancements or modifications to the scope of work that could elevate the value of the final brand deliverable.
13. **Potential Collaboration:** Given the concurrent RFP for a Tourism Master Plan, indicate if you're partnering with another agency or if there's any cross-over that might benefit both projects.
14. **Additional Insights:** Provide any other information, tools, or insights you believe would be beneficial for this branding project.

Your proposal will form an integral part of the contract.

SELECTION PROCESS & CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated by the HCTDA Executive Director, Marketing Manager and Marketing Committee, in consultation with the HCTDA Board of Directors, based on the specified criteria. Respondents might be requested to clarify details in their proposals during this evaluation. The HCTDA may also seek external feedback to ascertain a respondent's reputation.

HCTDA retains the right to negotiate changes to proposals, reject any proposal, or overlook minor discrepancies in the submission process. Depending on the number of responses, a shortlist may be created for virtual or in-person interviews. Interviews, however, aren't guaranteed for all respondents.

*Criteria include but are not limited to:*

Demonstrated previous experience developing and implementing strategic destination branding services in the Travel and Tourism sector	15
Quality, creativity and relevance of case studies provided	10
Scope of Work: Proposed Approach, Methodologies, Strategies & Timeline	20
Understanding of Haywood County area and use of existing research and information to develop strategies	25
Quality and experience of the personnel to be assigned to our project	10
Budget approach	20
TOTAL	100

Finalists may be invited by HCTDA for a virtual or in-person presentation. Those shortlisted should be prepared to visit Haywood County to present their proposal to the Visit NC Smokies selection committee. All associated travel costs will be borne by the respondent. The contract will be awarded based on the criteria in this RFP, with the final decision made by the Executive Director.

SUBMISSION DETAILS

All bid proposals shall be submitted electronically to:

Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant, [Hayley@VisitNCsmokies.com](mailto:Hayley@VisitNCsmokies.com). Submittal must be received no later than 3:00 PM (Eastern Standard Time), September 26, 2023. If a proposal submission is received after this deadline, it will not be considered and will be rejected without any further action by the HCTDA. All proposals shall be the property of the HCTDA and will become public record.



***Destination Branding Plan RFP Timeline\*:***

08.24.23	RFP published
09.07.23	Questions due
09.14.23	Responses to questions published
09.26.23	Proposals due by 3:00pm EST
10.18.23	Finalist Interviews if needed; in-person or virtual TBD
11.01.23	Contract(s) begin

\*Timeline subject to change. Any changes will be noted here:

<https://haywoodtda.com/request-for-proposal/>

***EXISTING COUNTY RESEARCH***

*Included below are links to a variety of existing plans and research that may be helpful in considering future research needed to work on the Destination Branding Project.*

[Haywood County Visitor Research, Summer 2022](#)

[Haywood County Tourism Long-term Destination Plan, 03.2023](#)

[Occupancy tax report, FY 7.1.2022-6.30.2023](#)

[Syneva Economics Evergreen Mill Closing Economic Impacts, 06.2023](#)

[State of the WNC Workforce Regional Study, 08.2022](#)

[Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan](#)

[Town of Maggie Valley Comprehensive Plan, 06.2023](#)

[Haywood County Parks & Recreation Master Plan, 02.2022](#)

[Haywood County Greenway Plan, 2023](#)

[Haywood County Affordable Housing Study, 06.2017](#)

**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