

VISITNC SMOKIES



Request for Proposal

Tourism Master Plan

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



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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

RFP OVERVIEW

Haywood County, located in the heart of Western North Carolina and surrounded by the majestic Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains, invites qualified consultants to submit proposals for the development of a comprehensive Tourism Master Plan/ Destination Development Plan. The goal of the plan is to leverage our unique cultural, historical, and natural resources to promote tourism, drive economic development, ensure sustainability, and enhance our community for both visitors and residents.

The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA), operating at Visit NC Smokies, 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. The selected consultant(s) will engage in a contract with HCTDA.

A Tourism Master Plan offers a strategic blueprint for positioning Haywood County as a premier destination. This initiative is pivotal in highlighting and ranking enhancements that bolster both resident and visitor experiences, solidifying the community's appeal as an ideal place to live, work, and explore. Collaborating closely with stakeholders, the plan emphasizes a balanced approach to fostering sustainable tourism growth while ensuring the community's enduring vitality. It seamlessly bridges the visitor economy, economic development, and communal interests. The creation of this plan for the County will center on destination evaluation, sustaining and growing our offerings, establishing clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), prioritizing initiatives, developing a clear action plan, and pinpointing funding sources.

The Tourism Master Plan will provide a thorough, strategic plan with indicators for destination stewardship for Haywood County in line with four key goals:

Four Key Goals:

Learning and Leading:

Unchecked tourism growth in neighboring regions has given us lessons. With our master plan, Haywood can set an example by fostering sustainable, community-centric growth that benefits both visitors and residents.

Economic Growth and Resilience:

Post the closure of the Pactiv Evergreen Paper Mill, it's evident we need to fill some gaps. Through strategic tourism planning, we can fill economic gaps and build resilience against future unforeseen challenges. Tourism can be a critical pillar in this economic progression, but only if we harness it strategically. The master plan will highlight areas of opportunity where tourism can plug the gaps and elevate our economic prospects.

Balancing Growth with Sustainability:

Our county's natural and cultural assets are invaluable. A master plan ensures we profit from them today without compromising their integrity for tomorrow. It's about economic gain balanced with long-term conservation.

Infrastructure Enhancement:

Assess the current tourism infrastructure and identify gaps. Develop a plan to enhance or establish new amenities, accommodations, and transportation routes to cater to the growing number of tourists without straining local resources.

The Tourism Master Plan will be crafted through a joint effort involving both public and private sectors, detailing actionable steps to realize the community's tourism vision and identifying those accountable for its execution. An essential component of this strategy is deep engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders: from industry insiders and business magnates to elected officials across tiers and representatives from various facets of Haywood County. This multifaceted engagement will incorporate methods such as meetings, surveys, interviews, focus discussions, and workshops to ensure comprehensive input and alignment on the future trajectory of tourism in our region.

Suggested Tourism Master Plan Process:

We present below a preliminary outline of the three-phased approach for creating our Tourism Master Plan. However, we highly encourage bidding companies to share their unique methodology and approach for project execution.

Phase I: Research and Insight Gathering

- Commence with foundational research that integrates insights from both visitors and the local community to capture a holistic understanding of the current state
- Insights derived from this phase will be pivotal in shaping the subsequent phases.

Phase II: Formulation of the Tourism Master Plan

This stage centers around the actual development of the plan.

- We anticipate incorporating visioning workshops and stakeholder engagement to crystallize priorities addressing our distinct opportunities and challenges.
- Potential consultants should illustrate their approach to stakeholder engagement.
- Based on the outcomes, formulate a set of recommendations and solidify them by assigning distinct roles and responsibilities for implementation.

Phase III: Strategy Execution and Continuous Improvement

The final phase concerns the practical application of the master plan.

- Articulate a robust implementation strategy, clearly defining the responsible parties for each action point.
- Propose a mechanism for consistent monitoring and periodic refinement of the plan, ensuring it remains relevant and effective. Benchmarks should be established to gauge the plan's success and areas for enhancement.
- Respondents are urged to detail their suggested project management techniques, emphasizing how they intend to ensure efficiency, timely delivery, and stakeholder satisfaction.

If it is deemed appropriate, the HCTDA could extend the agreement to include work on implementation of the plan. This decision will not be made until after the plan has been designed and presented.

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.

BACKGROUND - 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 note is the recent and unexpected closure of the Pactiv Evergreen Paper Mill, the county's largest employer. The closure left over a thousand residents without work and created a significant gap in the local economy of Canton and has substantial impacts both county wide and regionally. While the closure is consequential, and frankly scary, for such a small community, it can also be a catalyst for positive evolution across all 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** reopened in summer 2023 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, 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 Visit NC Smokies – Haywood County region, go to [VisitNCSmokies.com](https://www.visitncsmokies.com)

SCOPE OF WORK

In our pursuit of creating a Tourism Master Plan that is both comprehensive and reflective of Haywood County's unique charm and challenges, we propose a multifaceted approach. While the following scope describes our initial thoughts on the matter, we anticipate the selected consultant to provide a more refined and detailed perspective, tailoring the approach to best suit our requirements.

1. Stakeholder and Community Engagement:

- Engage and motivate stakeholders, industry partners, and community leaders.
- Employ innovative techniques to spearhead developmental conversations.

2. Research and Data Collection:

- Conduct comprehensive research targeting consumers, residents, and the industry to decipher prevailing and emerging trends in the tourism sector.
- Facilitate workshops and/or surveys with visitors, industry partners, and residents.

3. Destination Assessment:

- Undertake a thorough examination of Haywood County's potential as a 4-season visitor destination.
- Assess the county's regional nuances, interdependencies, prevailing services, and existing structures aiding tourism growth.
- Conduct destination visits, tours, and research for an exhaustive destination evaluation.

4. Product and Experience Inventory:

- Discern current market dynamics and pinpoint potential new market avenues.
- Recognize fresh product/experience opportunities in areas like arts, culture, sports tourism, venue and transportation development, among others.
- Complete a comprehensive tourism asset mapping, cataloging all current offerings including products, experiences, resources, and both saleable and non-saleable services. This process should also identify marketing assets, and pinpoint any gaps or opportunities for enhancement in the destination experience and infrastructure.

5. Strategic Development:

- Determine revenue and funding opportunities.
- Identify potential collaborations with new partners, including affinity brand partners.
- Pinpoint Haywood County's distinct tourism strengths and challenges.
- Highlight gaps and opportunities in tourism offerings specific to the county.

We encourage respondents to leverage this proposed scope as a foundational guide, infusing their expertise and insights to refine it further.

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.

Proposal Format & Requirements

Each submission should adhere to the following format and encompass the specified elements:

1. **Proposal Title and Contact Details:** The title page should include your firm's name, address, phone number, primary contact person, and their email address.
2. **Company Overview:** Provide a concise history and description of your agency/firm including a brief overview of relevant prior experiences
3. **Relevant Experience:** Provide links to, copies of or case studies of previous tourism master plans that showcase your work and subsequent community successes
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 & 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:** Provide details of a minimum of three (3) destination clients who have previously engaged your company for similar projects. Information should include the name, address, email and phone number of each reference.
7. **Conflict of Interest:** Confirm that neither your company nor any proposed sub-consultants are in any position that could be perceived as a conflict of interest regarding this project.
8. **Understanding & Approach:** Show us your firm has a clear understanding of the scope of work and objectives. Provide an outline of the project approach, your strategy, and methodology for executing the specified scope of work. Include a proposed timeline for the project.
9. **Financials:** Include a detailed breakdown of costs for the project, itemized for clarity.
10. **Potential Collaboration:** Given the concurrent RFP for Destination Branding, indicate if you're partnering with another agency or if there's any cross-over that might benefit both projects.
11. **Scope Adjustments:** Describe any suggestions for possible refinements or modifications to the proposed scope of work that you believe will enhance the final product's value. Include any recommendations on tasks that the HCTDA can undertake, allowing the budget to focus on the more critical components of the project.
12. **Additional Considerations:** Share any other pertinent information or insights you believe are crucial for the success of this project. Ensure that your proposal offers insights into how each element of the Scope of Work will be approached and fulfilled.

EVALUATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated by the HCTDA staff under the guidance of the Executive Director, alongside the HCTDA Product Development Committee and 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 proposal submitters.

Criteria include but are not limited to:

Demonstrated successful experience with similar destination clients	20
Qualifications and experience of staff to be assigned to our account	10
Understanding of Haywood County, our challenges and opportunities, the proposed Scope of Work and goals	30
Methodology and timeline proposed to develop a 10-year Tourism Master Plan with prioritized actionable items	20
Proposed fees and expenses	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. 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.

Tourism Master 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 complete a proposed Tourism Master Plan.

[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