

# VISITHATTIESBURG REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

## Tourism Industry Recovery, II



*The questions below were submitted to VisitHATTIESBURG by the published deadline of Feb. 24, 2023. No further questions will be accepted in reference to these RFPs/RFQ.*

## GENERAL RFP QUESTIONS

- 1. Can we submit the proposals via email? Do you require both digital AND printed versions? Does digital submission alone meet your requirements?**

As outlined in the RFP: Please submit your responses in hard copy and electronic format. All proposals should include a clear, concise narrative. Proposal format is open to presentation style but must include the aforementioned items. It is advised, but not required, to submit a printed proposal for each delegate of the RFP Scoring Committee (3).

Printed submissions must be marked "RFP: Ad Agency Services " and delivered to:

VisitHATTIESBURG  
c/o Paige Robertson  
308 Newman St.  
Hattiesburg, MS 39401

Electronic submissions should be provided in PDF format and sent to [probertson@visithburg.org](mailto:probertson@visithburg.org) with the subject line: "RFP: \_\_\_\_ Services." Proposals may not be faxed.

- 2. Though not required, how important is it to you that we print, bind, and ship three hard copies of the proposal?**

Although it is not required to provide each committee member with a bound copy of the proposal, it is required to ship at least one printed copy of the proposal for VisitHATTIESBURG's records.

- 3. Will the RFP Scoring Committee members be reviewing the proposals submitted via PDF on PC or Mac computers?**

The Committee has access to both Mac and PC computers. If there is a preference when submitting a proposal, please clearly state it in the email.

- 4. Do you have any page quantity limitations?**

No.

**5. Do you have any page size limitations (Letter, legal, tabloid)?**

Letter (8.5"x11") is preferred; however, fold-out sheets that fit in a regular bound submission are welcome.

**6. Will interviews be in person? Is there a mandatory pre-proposal meeting?**

All submissions received by the due date will be scored by the RFP committee using the published criteria outlined in the RFP. Proposals receiving the highest scores from their submission will be invited to the first round of interviews, which will be held via video call. Initial interviews will be held March 20 - 22, 2023. Follow-up and/or finalist interviews will be in person as needed.

**7. Is there an expectation that agencies will have in-person meetings with the VisitHATTIESBURG team?**

Yes, selected agencies will be expected to meet in person with the VisitHATTIESBURG team at the beginning of the contract period. Following that, update / white-glove meetings should be conducted minimally once per quarter if both parties agree. These meetings may be scheduled in person or through video chat.

**8. Do you have a style guide or a brand guide?**

Yes, you may view VisitHATTIESBURG's current branding guidelines [here](#).

**9. What is the place of performance/location? Can work be done remotely?**

Hattiesburg, MS – VisitHATTIESBURG is the official destination marketing organization for this location. Portions of the professional scope of services can be completed remotely if the selected agency has a strong, well-versed understanding of the destination and its visitor markets. All destination assets, including photography and videography, must be shot on location in Hattiesburg to ensure authenticity, in coordination with the VisitHATTIESBURG team.

**10. Will agencies who respond to more than one RFP for a destination be scored higher over an agency that only responds to one?**

No, each RFP will be individually scored based on the published criteria, without reference to other submitted proposals by the same agency.

**11. Do you want two separate proposal documents if bidding on multiple RFPs or one proposal document with two distinct sections addressing the Scopes of Work and two budget pages for the separate projects?**

Yes, a complete, independent document catered to the intended RFP should be submitted. If any individual or organization is responding to more than one RFP, then a separate submission is required for each. Do not combine responses.

**12. Is it required for the company to be based locally or in the state?**

This contract will be funded through federal ARPA dollars for Mississippi Tourism Recovery, II. *“Subject to applicable purchasing laws, destination marketing organizations will give preference, when available and practical, to Mississippi-based companies for any new contracts entered into for marketing activities.”*

With that, all companies that are registered and in good standing with the federal government are welcome to respond.

**13. Is VisitHATTIESBURG open to working with international agencies? Can agencies perform tasks related to these RFPs outside the U.S.?**

All selected agencies need to be registered and in good standing with the U.S. Federal government as a qualified vendor.

**14. Is your team open to a vendor using subcontractors? Our team has extensive design experience, but one of our partners has more experience in tourism and we’d like to work on this together.**

Yes, however, all subcontractors must be disclosed in the proposal and declare any potential Conflicts of Interest in order to be considered.

**15. In “Section F: Client Information,” clarify what you mean by declining order of size. Is this in terms of contracted amount/size of company/etc.?**

Contract amount and/or scope of services.

**16. In “Section F: Client Information,” do you want us to list clients that ended their relationship with us or that we ended the relationship with due to whatever reason?**

Proposer preference is welcome.

**17. Is the due date still the same?**

Yes, the published timeline has not changed.

## DIGITAL MEDIA SERVICES

- 18. Should the digital media budget be allocated for the remainder of 2023 or a full 12 months? Is the cost of media included in the budget of \$300,000?**

As outlined in the RFP: VisitHATTIESBURG will fund this contract at a minimum of \$300,000 for a one year-period. Please provide a proposed budget based on a full year of activities, strategy execution, account management, out-of-pocket expenses, and estimated costs related media that correspond to those detailed in your proposal. This should include cost per thousand and/or placement fees for media to a third-party if placement cannot be done directly. Base your proposed budget on a 12-month period.

- 19. The RFP states that the budget is based on strategy execution, account management fees, and other related costs. Does the budget also include the ad budget/spend?**

With a \$300,000 annual budget, yes.

- 20. Regarding budget, the description referred to it as being inclusive of 'estimated costs related to hosting media that correspond to those detailed in your proposal' - is this to say it should include recommended ad spend?**

Yes, include all media influencers and travel writers as well as the estimated reach of completed work.

- 21. Can we include programs in our proposal that are integrated and include print, broadcast, and/or digital media?**

Yes. Please specify the audience, reach, and other relevant KPIs as well as a budget when proposing such items.

- 22. Are your currently running tv commercials and/or radio spots?**

Not at this time. We have used these tactics in the past.

- 23. How are you currently using paid media to expand your reach?**

For the purposes of this RFP, VisitHATTIESBURG is not required to disclose the details of our media strategy.

- 24. What social channels are you currently using for paid campaigns?**

Facebook and Instagram primarily.

**25. Does the scope of work for the RFP for Digital Media Services include development of digital assets including video production or will that be under Advertising Agency Services?**

New and original video and digital asset production will fall under the advertising and production agency services. However, the selected digital media agency will have access to approved branding assets, if needed, to maximize effectiveness for all platforms if specific assets do not exist in the portfolio.

**26. Is there a library of previously created video or other digital assets that can be used for promotion?**

VisitHATTIESBURG maintains an extensive digital library of its destination assets. However, as many assets are pre-COVID or during COVID, the selected advertising agency will be responsible for producing new campaigns that include destination marketing and messaging; design and creation of various collateral pieces, both for use as print and digital; and integrated marketing activities, including digital marketing, social media strategies, traditional print, broadcast media and others relevant components.

**27. Regarding video and streaming audio for campaigns, do you need your agency provider to consult and produce these assets as part of your scope of work?**

Yes.

**28. Is there an incumbent for this project? If so, who? And how long have they been in place?**

VisitHATTIESBURG has contracted with a variety of digital media agencies in the last five years.

**29. What are VisitHATTIESBURG's geographical target markets?**



**30. What metrics are you currently using to track customer engagement? What do you currently consider a 'conversion?'**

Conversions are both considered when a potential visitor visits the website and are calculated by reviewing KPIs overlaid with in-market visitor data. Additionally, we will rely on the expertise of the digital media vendor to ensure our organization is tracking engagement and conversions in accordance with the best practices of the tourism industry.

**31. How has the budget been broken out, percentage-wise, between the high-level buckets of travelers you want to attract – Group Tours, Leisure, and Meetings?**

Leisure travel is VisitHATTIESBURG's primary visitor segment for its digital media services.

**32. Under Metrics, Reporting & Evaluation it states that reporting is to be provided by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of each month. There are sometimes managed digital buys with vendors where reporting is not available until the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. Should those types of digital media buys not be considered for media plans and instead only focus on self-managed buys?**

Proposing agencies should understand that the most important part of the RFP Reporting section is that there should be consistent, timely reporting monthly. VisitHATTIESBURG is required by law to submit monthly analytic reports to the State. Reporting can be discussed during contract negotiations with the selected agency, determining what is best for both VisitHATTIESBURG and the agency.

All media buys should be considered as part of the media plan/proposal.

**33. How many staff from your team would be involved in this engagement on an ongoing basis?**

The selected agency will have one main contact, but other team members might be brought in to fulfill specific needs.

## WEBSITE DESIGN / SUPPORT & MAINTENANCE

- 34. Regarding the line “Integrate with CMS (Tempest/IDSS), Threshold 360, Visit Widget trip planning tool, Newsletter platform, and social media accounts,” was this intended to read CRM (Tempest/IDSS), or will we need to integrate with a Tempest CMS in addition to building a new CMS for the website?**

Yes, it should say CRM, not CMS.

VisitHATTIESBURG is open to CMS recommendations as long as the successful integration of necessary tools and platforms can occur.

*\*\* To reduce any further confusion, we have updated all mentions of “CMS (Tempest/IDSS)” to “CRM (Tempest/IDSS)” in these questions. \*\**

- 35. Do you have any preference for a CMS?**

We do not have a preference for a CMS. However, the proposed CMS should be established, credible, and reliable.

- 36. Regarding CMS, it is noted that 'open-source CMS' is preferred. We typically build sites on either WordPress or SiteWrench (proprietary CMS with higher level of security and ease of use). Are you open to either CMS solutions or do you prefer WordPress?**

We are open to recommendations.

- 37. What CMS is the current site built on?**

Umbraco.

- 38. There are a couple of mentions in the RFP that the agency must be able to "integrate with CRM (Tempest/IDSS)." Please confirm whether you are referring to integrating the proposed CMS/website with IDSS or if you have already determined that you will be using Tempest's preferred CMS Craft?**

We are currently clients of IDSS/Tempest. Proposals for this RFQ should include a CRM comparable to this platform in the destination marketing sector. The desired specifications are outlined in the RFQ.

- 39. In what capacity would you like to integrate your Tempest/IDSS CRM with the website?**

All hotel, restaurant, attraction, and event listings are managed through IDSS. This platform should be used to populate these areas of the website.

- 40. Can you provide additional context to items listed in the RFP under Website Functionality Requirements: Integrate with CRM (Tempest/IDSS). From online research Tempest appears to be an agency and IDSS is the CRM platform. Can you clarify if any collaboration is expected between the new vendor and the team at Tempest?**

Collaboration is expected to the extent that IDSS is currently used to populate the site. Please refer to the above question for details.

- 41. Regarding this line, "Integrate with CRM (Tempest/IDSS), Threshold 360, Visit Widget trip planning tool, newsletter platform, and social media accounts," can you provide links (social media accounts excluded) to these specific platforms so our developer can do research on their compatibility with her recommendations?**

<https://www.idss.com/> | <https://visitwidget.com/> | <https://www.threshold360.com/>  
<https://myemma.com/>

- 42. Do you have a Website Design & Maintenance budget you are able to share? Does the budget include tech support and hosting?**

As outlined in the RFQ: VisitHATTIESBURG will fund this contract at a maximum of \$70,000 for the initial design and launch. In your proposal, include your fees on a flat rate, per component, hourly, or any combination, as needed and described. Provide estimated costs pertaining to the scope of services outlined in the RFQ, along with any anticipated additional expenses VisitHATTIESBURG may incur. VisitHATTIESBURG reserves the right to adjust both the budget and related services. VisitHATTIESBURG is seeking a two-year contract with a potential third-year option included. The period will be determined partially by fees, as well as the strength of the proposal and creativity.

- 43. What was the investment in the previous website?**

The current website is a cross-product of IDSS, in-house graphic design, and ad agency for several component parts for a reskin. A specific dollar amount is not applicable; however, VisitHATTIESBURG has allocated up to \$70,000 for a new website.

- 44. Can you confirm that the budget listed in the RFP includes budget for both Component A and Component B?**

Yes, this budget is inclusive of both components. However, an annual or ongoing maintenance budget is requested as part of the proposal.

- 45. Would you like detailed research in terms of your audience in the form of an audience needs assessment?**

Our current market data research needs are not a part of this RFP process.

- 46. Do you have a desired launch date? Is there a specific event driving the launch date?**

VisitHATTIESBURG's new website should be completed and launched in the 2023 calendar year.



**47. Are there any dates or events we should be aware of that may impact the launch of the new website?**

No, the new website should be launched in the 2023 calendar year.

**48. How many pages of content do you anticipate transferring to the new site?**

The current website is a cross-platform, multi-interfaced CMS. Quantifying the number of pages to be moved over from our current website is difficult due to its dynamic nature. The current site is approximately 500 pages.

**49. For content load and migration, would you like your partner to handle all content or is your staff willing to assist with content as needed to help manage budget and priorities?**

The selected vendor should be able to process data and information into the new platform with minimal assistance. However, to ensure the successful transfer of all assets, staff will be on hand to assist.

**50. What are your current pain points with the existing website?**

Please refer to the “Scope of Services” section of the RFQ for these details.

**51. What are the current technical challenges (if any)?**

Please refer to the “Scope of Services” section of the RFQ for these details.

**52. Will you require different levels of admin permissions?**

Yes.

**53. How many people are on your team that would be administering or making edits to the website?**

There will be two to three administrators and five to seven “editors.”

**54. Do you expect copywriting or editing services as part of engagement for Website Design & Maintenance?**

Primarily, no. However, the selected web developer will be expected to have a keen understanding of SEO, content best practices, and optimization of multiple platforms and browser.

**55. Do you intend to build an online portal for local tour operators to log in and add their listings on to the websites?**

No. We would like a form similar to [this one](#) integrated into the site that people may submit new attractions, restaurants, shopping, events, etc.

**56. Do you have any specific tourism third-party integrations like booking.com, TripAdvisor, weather services, webcams, or building-specific features like trip planning, favorites, and itinerary builders?**

Currently, we do not have any of the mentioned third-party integrations on VisitHBURG.org. Current integrations include CRM (Tempest/IDSS), Visit Widget trip planning tool, Threshold360, newsletter platform (Emma), and social media accounts. As outlined in the RFQ: We would like a recommendation on linking Yelp, Trip Advisor, and/or Google Business reviews for restaurants, hotels, or attractions. Any other appropriate integrations are welcome in proposals.

**57. For "functional search", how does your current search meet or fail to meet your needs?**

It meets basic functionality needs.

**58. Besides the Homepage and standard interior page templates, are there any other unique templates you'd like included in this SOW?**

Refer to question below for Top Landing Pages from our Google Analytics. We recommend reviewing our current site and offering comps and/or suggestions from there.

**59. Can we have an indication of the traffic levels for the website?**

As outlined in the RFQ: Analytics below are for a one-year time frame.

Audience Overview

Users – 311,896

Age – 56.8% of users are between 25 and 54 years old.

Number of Sessions / User – 1.43

Sessions – 446,052

Pageviews – 793,994

Pages / Session – 1.78

Avg. Session Duration – 1:01

Bounce Rate – 79.83%

Top Landing Pages:

Things To Do, Restaurants, Themed Itineraries, Events, Event / Meeting Planners

**60. Will your team be providing video and photo assets, or do you need your agency partner to assist with planning and production?**

VisitHATTIESBURG maintains an extensive digital library of its destination assets. However, as many assets are pre-COVID or during COVID, the selected advertising/production agency will be responsible for producing new campaigns that include destination marketing and messaging; design and creation of various collateral pieces, both for use on the new website; and integrated marketing activities, including digital marketing, social media strategies, traditional print, broadcast media and others relevant components.

**61. Can you provide additional context to items listed in the RFP under Website Functionality Requirements: Video/Motion. Is this adding video that already exists, or are you looking for the vendor to develop video(s)?**

The Ad/Production agency will largely handle video development. However, website developer is expected to provide recommendations on length, size, etc. to maximize SEO and audience engagement.

**62. Are you looking for a content refresh as well with the new website?**

In cooperation with the ad agency, new video assets, still photography, and other updated assets will need to be integrated into the new site. Some copywriting will need to be updated as well to follow SEO best practices.

**63. Is content creation in scope for the vendor or will your team be producing/revising the content for the new website?**

Both. See question above for details.

**64. Are you currently using any SEO tools or services?**

Historically, we have put a priority on SEO services. In 2022, we did not have any contracts.

**65. Are you currently using any ADA tools or services?**

We strive in-house to be ADA compliant using best practices on web content and metadata. We do not currently have any specific tools in place.

**66. Do you employ any third parties for ADA audits?**

Not at this time.

**67. Do you want the agency to provide hosting, or do you intend to use any specific hosting provider?**

We are reviewing all options through this process.

## ADVERTISING AGENCY SERVICES

- 68. The Scope of Work cites creative strategy spanning at least 24 months; however, the budget section says three years with a “minimum of \$279K” and that it may be adjusted. For planning purposes, should we assume \$279K for the first two years? Then additional funding negotiated for year three? Does the minimum of \$279K extend across one year or across 3 years, with each year having an equal budget?**

As outlined in the Advertising Agency RFP, VisitHATTIESBURG wishes to work with an agency for a minimum of 24 consecutive months with a minimum budget of \$279,000. However, ad agencies are given the latitude to extend the proposal to three years / 36 months to complete the overall Scope of Work. No assumptions should be made that any additional budget will be provided. VisitHATTIESBURG reserves the right to adjust both the budget and related services.

The total production budget is \$279K. This budget may be billed over a three-year period. As stated in the RFP, year one will require the largest amount of production; therefore, the budget should not be split evenly.

As noted in the RFP, qualifications to execute the plan of work, including the cost of services, is 60% of the scoring criteria.

- 69. Does the noted budget (under Available Funds) include the net cost due to media outlets or is this just the budget for agency fees, oversight, management, media planning/placement, production, execution, and out-of-pocket expenses?**

The budget noted in the Advertising Agency Services RFP is the budget for agency fees. However, to ensure proper procurement procedures, agencies must disclose their placement fees for all media. An allocated VisitHATTIESBURG Tourism Recovery Funding is dedicated to direct, non-digital media placement.

- 70. Regarding budget, can you clarify what is classified as an "out-of-pocket expense"?**

Items that VisitHATTIESBURG might incur such as licensing fees, travel costs, handling/ mailing a direct mail piece, media costs, installation and/or printing.

- 71. Regarding budget, the description referred to it as being inclusive of 'media placement fees' - is this to say it includes recommended ad spend and other production costs (brochure printing, direct mail printing & list buying, billboard vinyl contract fees, etc.)?**

No, “media placement fee” is considered the amount billed to VisitHATTIESBURG by an agency to handle the contracts and purchase of placed media.

**72. One of your requirements for an agency is: Update, digitally publish, and print destination guides, brochures, sales kits, and other relevant Hattiesburg marketing materials. Would the printing and creation of the guide over the three years come out of that 270k or is there a separate budget for that?**

There is a supplemental budget for the cost of print production.

**73. Another requirement is: Create printed direct mailing pieces. Would the printing of the pieces come from the \$270k or is there a separate budget for that?**

There is a supplemental budget for the cost of print production.

**74. Another requirement is: Update and/or add in-market signage/kiosks at main attractions and hotels. Will the actual construction of these come from the \$270K or is there a separate budget for this?**

There is a supplemental budget for construction, buying, and/or printing such items. However, all creative and design costs are in the ad agency budget.

**75. Another requirement is: Create a portfolio of new marketing assets, including photos, videos, and testimonials, for use in promotional materials and sustainable travel campaigns. Would the video/photo shoot budget come from the \$270K or is there a separate budget for that?**

There is not a separate budget for this. Photo/video shoot materials, talent, etc. are considered a portion of the \$270K.

**76. Additionally, the scope says “clearly position Hattiesburg to visitors as an affordable and safely open destination.” Is that meant literally? And how heavily does this need to be implemented? Visit Hattiesburg's mission is to “position Hattiesburg as a year-round premier leisure and business destination in the Gulf South.”**

This contract will be funded through the American Rescue Plan Recovery Act, with the goal of economic recovery for the tourism sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Agencies responding should showcase their destination marketing expertise through their responses, including ways to align with VisitHATTIESBURG’s overall mission and destination marketing strategy.

**77. The Agency Services includes “secure contracts with an Online Travel Agency (OTA).” Are you able to elaborate on the OTA services in relation to advertising campaigns?**

Ideal candidates should have the ability to present their OTA strategy to VisitHATTIESBURG, including placement and budget recommendations as well as a projected ROI.

**78. Does VisitHBURG have a current relationship with an OTA?**

Yes.

**79. Can you clarify what “Stay and Play” packages mean to your organization and destination?**

In the tourism sector, “Stay and Play” means multiple overnight accommodations with an accompanying itinerary of recreational offerings in the destination.

**80. Are there any plans to change the branding within the next 2 years?**

VisitHATTIESBURG is open to a brand refresh, including a new logo. However, the overall *feel* of the destination’s assets will remain in place.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY SERVICES**

### **81. How many press releases/newsletters do you expect to send annually?**

Pitches should be ongoing. An agency would send a minimum number of “official” releases annually to cover seasonal/themed roundups and more.

### **82. Are hard costs for hosting journalists (transportation, lodging, etc.) included in the agency budget or allocated from a separate budget?**

These items should be estimated in the agency budget and set aside. Budget updates are requested any time that “account” is used.

### **83. Do you expect agency representation for media marketplace representation (i.e. IMM, IPW)? If so, do you have a list of anticipated shows for 2023?**

VisitHATTIESBURG prefers its in-house team to primarily represent the destination at media marketplaces. However, the selected PR agency should provide additional avenues of exposure where opportunities exist, including both desk-side meetings.

### **84. If possible, please provide a copy of your current media reports and/or most relevant KPIs.**

Copies cannot be provided. KPIs vary based on type of media (influencer, blogger, traditional) being used. Generally, VisitHATTIESBURG reviews customer/fan base (location, gender, interest, income), engagement rate, reach, clicks, credibility, and authority before working with any media.

### **85. Please provide a breakdown of expected number of media to be hosted in-destination and the breakdown percentage of influencers to traditional media.**

Minimally, four media should be hosted in-destination per year by the agency. VisitHATTIESBURG has primarily worked with traditional media in the past, but we are open to recommendations regarding influencers as well.

### **86. Do you expect agency representation on group press tours?**

If a group press tour is arranged by the agency, yes.

*The questions above were submitted to VisitHATTIESBURG by the published deadline of Feb. 24, 2023. No further questions will be accepted in reference to these RFPs/RFQ.*

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