

Request for Proposals (RFP) to Develop a Branding and Marketing Plan for the New Jersey Highlands Region

RFP Issued: November 28, 2023

Question & Answer Cut-off Date: December 15, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

Submittal Deadline: January 16, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.

I. Request to Submit Proposals

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) is soliciting proposals consisting of a Statement of Qualifications, Technical Proposal, and Rate Schedule & Budget from Teams with expertise in tourism branding and marketing for the purpose of positioning the Highlands Region to increase tourism, support agriculture, bolster local businesses, and improve economic sustainability. The project is to develop a comprehensive Branding and Marketing Plan for the Highlands Region and shall include development of a unique brand, a marketing campaign, and an implementation action plan. The marketing and branding campaign should encapsulate the unique environment of the Highlands Region and the various types of tourism and recreation it has to offer visitors from all areas.

II. Background

The Highlands Region (the Region) is a physiographic area of northern New Jersey, comprised of 88 municipalities within parts of seven counties. The Highlands is a diverse landscape with both rural and densely developed areas. The geographic boundaries of the Region are established in the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, see N.J.S.A. §§ 13:20-1 *et seq.* (Highlands Act), which also created the Highlands Council. There are a number of goals in the Highlands Act that the Highlands Council is responsible for achieving. The overarching goal is protection of the Region's natural resources with an emphasis on protection of water. However, economic health is recognized as an important component of the Region's long-term viability and the Highlands Act sets forth goals to support economic sustainability in the Region. In particular, the tourism and agriculture industries in the Highlands Region are key components of a sustainable economy.

A Regional Master Plan (RMP) was adopted for the Highlands Region in 2008. An Economic Sustainability Plan for the Highlands Region was released by the Highlands Council in December 2021 to supplement the economic development section of the RMP. The Economic Sustainability Plan was developed over an 18-month period, analyzing current economic conditions in the Highlands and setting forth a series of goals and objectives to strengthen the Region's economy. The Plan identifies a series of actions devised to advance the stated goals and objectives; one of which is the creation of a branding and marketing plan to create a distinct Highlands image. The brand and ultimate marketing efforts are intended to reach a very broad audience. The Highlands RMP and the Economic Sustainability Plan should be consulted in the preparation of any proposal in response to this RFP.

See links here:

https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/master/rmp/final/highlands_rmp_112008.pdf

https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/master/economic-sustainability/final/esp_final_2022.pdf

III. Scope of Services

The objective of this project is to establish a comprehensive branding and marketing strategy to strengthen tourism and agriculture, as well as educating residents and visitors about the valuable resources that are part of the Highlands Region. The expectation is a collaborative effort that includes our statewide tourism partners, agricultural industry professionals, and Highlands advocates to develop an identifiable and unique brand that delivers an image of a diverse, healthful landscape. The plan should incorporate the various

types of tourism (such as but not limited to eco-tourism, agri-tourism, heritage tourism, arts and culture tourism) and create a unified brand and marketing strategy that clearly and creatively identifies the Region's assets. The resulting product will include the following components (see detailed descriptions in delineated tasks below):

- Brand Identification
- Marketing Materials
- Implementation Strategy

The selected Team will undertake the following tasks:

A. Brand Identification

The goal is to ensure that the totality of the Highlands Region's environment is represented by the Highlands brand. The brand identity must embody the value of the natural, agricultural, historical and cultural resources, the quality of life in the Region, and the need/desire to treat the area with sensitive care. The Highlands possesses a unique combination of walkable downtowns and scenic rural countryside; river towns and lake communities; historical sites and cultural attractions; abundant parkland and outdoor recreation opportunities; natural beauty and scenic vistas; pastoral agricultural landscapes and local farm markets; and cultural, dining and arts hubs. Many of the towns and sites in the Region will be host to the 250th Anniversary of the United States and the marketing/branding strategy will help to position them as we celebrate the country's birthday. We seek a brand that conveys the eclectic nature of the Highlands and can serve as a symbol of all the Region has to offer.

Task: Create an umbrella brand that represents the Region with all the elements that make the Highlands a destination, including the counties and towns, businesses, arts, culture, heritage and historic sites, agricultural operations, and natural assets. Working alongside our tourism and agriculture partners, develop a brand that supports their existing/ongoing efforts and establishes the Highlands Region as a valuable and attractive place. Make the Highlands Region brand synonymous with the abundant recreation opportunities, agricultural assets, and high quality of life within the Region.

Deliverables:

- a) Stakeholder Outreach Plan: With substantial input from Highlands Council staff, establish an outreach plan for working with Highlands stakeholders who represent tourism, such as the newly designated Central Jersey region, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), agricultural operations, and other appropriate entities.
- b) Brand identity profile: What is the Highlands Region and why is it desirable, valuable, and unique? (Differentiation from other regional tourism initiatives/brands.)
- c) Brand logo and tagline
- d) Develop license agreement for use of materials and brand
- e) Accompanying graphic assets

B. Marketing Materials

Marketing materials should contain unique and distinct ideas and perceptions that may be used to help grow tourism, support agricultural products, and encourage value for natural and cultural resources in the Highlands Region. Materials should be designed to be easily customized by municipalities, counties, nonprofits, and local businesses, in addition to potential commercial applications, without deteriorating the core brand. These materials should be targeted to both New Jersey residents and out-of-state visitors/businesses.

Task: Develop a collection of marketing materials that can be used on various platforms and by different interested parties in the Highlands Region. There should be both traditional/print marketing materials and digital (social media, online) materials to reach various markets and interests. The brand will be used in conjunction with other brands already in use throughout the Region, such as “Explore Hunterdon.”

Deliverables:

- a) Messaging scheme that clearly identifies and promotes the Highlands Region as a distinct, unique destination.
- b) A cohesive collection of graphic assets and copy developed under the Highlands brand, including:
 - a. A tourism/marketing website;
 - b. Digital materials for use on social media and related advertising platforms;
 - c. Print materials;
 - d. Electronic communications: newsletters, email blasts, surveys, blogs, etc.;
 - e. Signage; and
 - f. Trade show/exhibit support: Backdrop, tabletop, image or film loop, and collateral materials for use at trade shows and other venues where travelers or travel and trip planners convene.

C. Implementation Action Plan

An implementation action plan should provide a timeline and the mechanisms by which the Highlands brand will be launched and rolled out. The action plan should be tailored to the brand identification, reflecting the value of Highlands resources, quality of life in the Region, and the importance of managing the Region sensitively. The goal of the action plan is to bolster tourism, support the Region’s farm community, increase visitation of art, historic and heritage sites and resources, and drive customers to local businesses, while valuing the natural environment.

Task: Create a strategic implementation action plan to introduce the Highlands brand and facilitate its recognition to relevant audiences. Develop a short-term and mid-term strategy to launch the brand and gather feedback about its reception in the marketplace. The initial focus will be tourism, agriculture, and local business communities. Longer term advertising and outreach strategies should be created to ensure the Highlands brand is effective into the future. The suggested action items shall include anticipated cost levels.

Deliverables:

- a) A comprehensive marketing strategy (digital and traditional) to be applied in all relevant mediums.
 - a. Digital – social media platforms, websites, online videos, etc.
 - b. Traditional – print ads, billboard art, direct mailings, etc.
- b) Subject specific implementation actions (e.g., Agriculture, Tourism, Outdoor Activities, Historic and Cultural).
- c) Format(s) for testing the reception of the Highlands Brand and gauging its effectiveness. Upon approval from Highlands staff, implement the testing and deliver results.
- d) Advice and assistance with rolling out the brand.
- e) Estimation of budget levels necessary to achieve stated goals, including the potential for ongoing support.

Timeframe

The Council anticipates that the timeframe to complete Tasks A through C will be nine (9) to twelve (12) months. The Team shall prepare and submit regular progress reports for Highlands Council review.

The Team's ability to devote sufficient resources to these tasks in the expected timeframe should be reflected in its detailed schedule (see Section IV, B.2), although Teams may propose alternative timeframes that achieve a reasonable completion of the Scope of Services in an expedited manner. The Highlands Council will consider the Team's proposed timeframe in awarding the proposal.

IV. RFP Submittal Requirements

A. Proposals must include the following items:

1. Contact Information: Provide the name and address of each of the Team members, name, telephone number, and electronic mail address of the individual(s) responsible for preparation of the proposal who may be contacted in the event of questions or notification, and the location of the office, if other than that shown above at which the services to be provided hereunder will be performed.
2. Understanding of the Scope of Services: A statement of the Team's understanding of the project described in the Scope of Services and the Highlands Council's needs and commitment that the Team is able to perform the Scope of Services within the required timeframe.
3. Technical Approach and Proposed Work Plan: A detailed description of the Team's approach for satisfactorily completing the Scope of Services set forth in Section III above including any alternate suggestions for implementation. Include a detailed schedule that includes a description of all tasks and activities, significant milestones and anticipated deliverables.
4. Statement of Qualifications: Provide the following:
 - a. Type of business (e.g., corporation, limited liability company, 501(c)(3));
 - b. Number of years in business and number of years providing relevant services;
 - c. Type of services provided;
 - d. Description of your Team's past experience that is most relevant to this project;
 - e. Detailed organizational chart; and
 - f. Explanation of the experience of each member of the Team assigned to perform the Scope of Services, including experience on similar projects, key personnel qualifications and relevant experience. Resumes of all qualified professionals who will be responsible for assisting with or completing assigned tasks shall be provided.
5. Work Examples: Provide at least three (3) examples of previous projects, work product, publications and reports, demonstrating direct experience with the type of work outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above. For each of these examples, provide the following information:
 - a. Name and address of client;
 - b. Year(s) during which work was performed;
 - c. Contract amount; and
 - d. Details of work performed.

6. Staffing Plan: Provide an organizational structure (flow chart), showing all personnel who will work on executing the Scope of Services, including the identity of any alternate personnel, sub-consultants or sub-contractors the Team intends to utilize to perform the Scope of Services.
7. Staffing Matrix: Provide a staffing matrix that graphically depicts the key personnel identified in Paragraph IV.A.6 above, who worked on the example projects listed in Paragraph IV.A.5 above, and what his/her role was with respect to each example project. Also list the roles and responsibilities each of those personnel will have with respect to the proposed project outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above.

Personnel	Role	Example Project	Example Project	Example Project
Jane A. Smith	Chief Economist	X		X
Joe A. Smith	Market Analyst		X	X
Jane A. Doe	Planner		X	

8. Sub-contractors: If applicable, submit a statement of the Team's intent to sub-contract. If sub-contractors, sub-consultants or any alternate personnel are to be utilized in the performance of the Scope of Services, list each sub-contractor and identify responsibilities, tasks, schedule, and costs and provide resumes of key personnel. All sub-contractors must be approved by the Highlands Council prior to utilization of the sub-contractor. The Team is fully responsible for any sub-contractor.
9. Statement of Availability: Provide an affirmative statement detailing the Team's availability over the twelve (12) months and its ability during that time to work interactively with Highlands Council staff remotely or at our offices in Chester, NJ.
10. Litigation/Disciplinary Action: If any member of the Team, or any principal therein (in his or her official capacity with the Team), has been engaged in any litigation as a defendant involving a sum of \$100,000 or more and/or subject to any professional disciplinary action over the last three years, provide a description of the litigation and/or disciplinary action.
11. Concurrent Project(s) of a Substantially Similar Nature: The State is restricted from paying for duplicative concurrent work. Accordingly, if the Team is currently engaged or will be engaged in the near future in any contracts with a substantially similar scope of work to this RFP, the Team shall provide a detailed description of that project and scope.
12. References: Provide no less than three (3) references, including at least two (2) clients for whom services have been provided within the past three years regarding efforts similar to those outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above. Provide the contact names, positions and phone numbers for representatives of each entity listed as a reference. The Highlands Council reserves the right to contact references for information that may be used in the evaluation process.
13. N.J. Business Registration Certificate. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:32-44, the Team must provide proof of valid business registration with the Division of Revenue in the Department of Treasury.
14. Acceptance of Contract Terms. A statement certifying that the Team has no existing or foreseen conflicts to perform the services requested by the Highlands Council as envisioned under the above Scope of Services and accepts the Council's Contract Standard Terms and Conditions attached as Appendix D.

15. Certifications/Disclosures. The Team must provide certification and disclosure documents in compliance with Public Law 2005, Chapter 51; Public Law 2005, Chapter 271; and Executive Order 129 (codified as P.L. 2005, c. 92). Certification forms relating to these provisions are attached hereto as Appendices A, B, and C respectively.
- B. Technical Proposals must include the following items:
1. A detailed approach for achieving satisfactory results regarding the Scope of Services of Section III above; and
 2. A detailed schedule and flow chart of tasks for completion of the Scope of Services.
- C. Cost Proposal, Rate Schedule & Budget: The Proposal must include in a separate sealed envelope (please mark as confidential):
1. A rate schedule that details fully loaded project hourly rates, which includes all overhead and profit that may be incurred in performing the project;
 2. An overall project budget and detailed fixed fee proposal broken out by task based on the Scope of Services;
 3. Note: All direct expenses shall be billed at cost.
- D. Submittal Requirements: The complete Proposal, including Statement of Qualifications, Technical Proposal, Rate Schedule & Budget and all certifications must be received **no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on January 16, 2024**. The complete Proposal must be provided electronically, via e-mail to Chief Counsel Gabrielle Gallagher, Esq. (gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov). Late Proposals will not be considered.

V. Restrictions on Communications with Highlands Council Staff

Any questions regarding this RFP must be submitted to Gabrielle Gallagher, (gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov), **no later than 5:00 p.m. Friday, December 15, 2023**. Respondents to this RFP are instructed not to communicate in any other manner than as set forth immediately above with any other representatives of the Highlands Council during the submission process, and not to communicate with any representatives of the Highlands Council during the selection process for this contract, unless such communication was initiated by a representative of the Highlands Council in connection with any request for clarification to a response. In the event that any Addenda or clarifying communication arises out of a question submitted by a respondent or Team, the said clarification and response or Addendum shall be issued to all respondents. Only the interpretations and/or corrections issued as a written Addendum to the RFP by a representative of the Highlands Council shall be binding. No other source is authorized to give information regarding any explanation or interpretation of the RFP.

General Requirements and Information

- A. If submitted by a corporation (joint venture, associated teams, etc.), the Proposal shall be signed by a corporate officer authorized to do so. If submitted by an individual, that individual shall sign the Proposal. If the Team is a general partnership, one or more of the partners shall sign. If a limited partnership, the managing partner(s) or general partner(s) shall sign.
- B. The Highlands Council reserves the right to require the submission of additional information regarding experience and qualifications as it may deem necessary and may consider any available evidence on the financial, technical, or other qualifications and abilities of the Team.
- C. This RFP does not commit the Highlands Council to award a contract to any respondent or Team or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation or mailing of the Proposal.
- D. The Highlands Council reserves the right to reject all Proposals, or abandon all or part of this Project, prior to award of any contracts, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq. Proposals may be rejected for any or all of the following reasons:

- Not responsive to this RFP;
 - Team is not authorized to do business in the State of New Jersey;
 - Failure to include any required information with the submittal; and/or,
 - Failure to disclose any existing or potential conflict of interest.
- E. The Highlands Council reserves the right to waive any and all irregularities and informalities in the Proposals and to request clarification of qualifications prior to qualifying a Team.
- F. The selected Team must provide certification and disclosure documents in compliance with Public Law 2005, Chapter 51; Public Law 2005, Chapter 271, and Executive Order 129 (codified as P.L. 2005, c. 92) prior to the award of any contract. Certification forms relating to these provisions are attached hereto as Appendices A, B, and C respectively.
- G. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:32-44, the selected Team must provide proof of valid business registration with the Division of Revenue in the Department of Treasury prior to the award of any contract.
- H. If awarded the contract, the selected Team shall be required to comply with the requirements of N.J.S.A. 10:5-31 et seq. and N.J.A.C. 17:27-1.1 et seq. regarding affirmative action.
- I. After the receipt of proposals, the Highlands Council reserves the right to negotiate with any number of Teams it chooses in its discretion prior to awarding a contract.
- J. Documents/information submitted in response to this RFP generally shall be available to the public except as permitted by the common law, and State law, including the New Jersey Open Public Records Act, N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et seq.

VI. Team Selection Process

- A. Based upon the Proposals, taking into consideration staff's recommendation, and its own determination as to which proposal is most advantageous to the needs of the Highlands Council, the Council may issue a contract award. In selecting the most qualified Team for the services of this RFP, the Highlands Council will consider the following:
1. The background, qualifications, skills, and experience of the Team and its staff;
 2. The Team's degree of expertise concerning the area at issue, specifically prior tourism sector experience;
 3. The Team's proposed technical approach to the issues raised in the project description or specifications;
 4. The Team's capacity to meet the requirements of the project at issue within the timeframe established by the Highlands Council;
 5. The rate or price to be charged by the Team;
 6. The Highlands Council's prior experiences with the Team;
 7. The Team's familiarity with the work, requirements, and systems of the Highlands Council;
 8. The Team's references;
 9. Interviews with prospective Teams;
 10. Geographical location of the Team's offices; and
 11. Familiarity with all applicable State and federal laws and regulations.
- B. Upon selection of the qualified Team, the Highlands Council and the Team will execute a professional services contract, on a time and materials basis on a "total costs not to exceed" basis. The professional

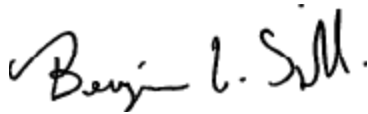
services contract will include the Highlands Council's Professional Services Contract Standard Terms and Conditions, which are attached hereto as Appendix D.

VII. Term and Termination

- A. The initial term of the professional services contract shall be for a period of twelve (12) months from when it is formally entered into by the parties and may be extended upon agreement by both parties that the detailed Scope of Work requires additional time for effective completion.
- B. The Highlands Council may, at any time, terminate the professional services contract in whole or in part for the Highlands Council's convenience and without cause when the Highlands Council determines in its sole discretion that termination is in the public interest. Upon receipt of an order of termination for convenience, the Team shall not proceed with any item of work, unless specifically authorized to do so in writing. In such a case, unless mutually agreed to by the parties, the Team will not be entitled to payment for any services provided after the effective date of such termination.

If there are any questions regarding this Request for Proposals, please contact Gabrielle Gallagher via email at gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COUNCIL



Benjamin L. Spinelli
Executive Director

Dated: November 28, 2023