



WEST
VIRGINIA®

**Request for
Expression of Interest
for Marketing Services**

almost heaven®

The West Virginia Department of Tourism (“Tourism”) is excited to begin the search for new expert agencies eager to join the team focused on sharing Almost Heaven with the world. Creativity, collaboration, and expertise are core to Tourism’s mission. New agencies are invited to present big ideas to leverage Tourism’s \$40+ million annual budget to grow the state’s visitation.

Driven by the goal of delivering best-in-class creative, public relations, and social media strategies, Tourism is dividing its scope of work. This decision is backed by the growth the industry has experienced, as well as the specialization and expertise required to manage the below areas:

- Brand Strategy, Creative, & Media Buying
- Public Relations & Experiential Marketing
- Content & Social Media

Proposals for the three scopes of work will be scored separately, but interested agencies (“Vendor”) may bid on one or more depending on their areas of expertise.

Though these contracts will primarily service Tourism, the successful Vendor(s) may be asked to provide advisory services for other State of West Virginia agencies implementing the Almost Heaven brand in coordination with Tourism. Agencies may include but are not limited to the West Virginia Department of Economic Development in its business recruitment efforts and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources in its hunting and fishing license sales.



Mission

The Department of Tourism is the state's lead destination marketing organization that works with private industry partners to build and promote a world-class destination that provides jobs, stimulates investment, grows existing businesses, and promotes a positive image of the state as a place to visit, go to college, live, work, and retire.

About the Department of Tourism

THE CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM IN WEST VIRGINIA

Tourism in West Virginia has seen a major resurgence over the past seven years. In 2017, Tourism's marketing budget was tripled. The Almost Heaven campaign was launched a year later, and the state's tourism numbers have skyrocketed ever since.

Last year, the economic impact of tourism in West Virginia topped \$7 billion, the highest in the state's history. Visitor spending has grown more than 30%—or more than \$1 billion a year—since 2016, despite a global pandemic. Our pandemic recovery was quick. In 2022, travelers in West Virginia spent 17% more than before the pandemic, dwarfing the U.S. travel spending increase of just 1% in the same timeframe.

Traveler spending in West Virginia contributes significantly to the state's economy:

- On average, visitors now spend \$14.5 million per day.
- Food and beverage spending now exceeds \$1.4 billion annually.
- Annual lodging spending surpassed \$800 million for the first time ever.
- West Virginia has seen a 275% increase in short-term rental revenue since 2019.
- The tourism industry now supports more than 59,000 West Virginia jobs, one out of every 16 in the state.
- Tourism jobs account for nearly \$2 billion in annual earnings.

Backed by tremendous state and local support, the tourism industry in West Virginia is uniquely positioned for future growth. Buy-in and investment in tourism are strong on all levels, from local leaders and state legislators to the executive branch and federal representatives.

Evidence of that is record-breaking levels of investment in our state parks and trail systems. West Virginia State Parks are also currently wrapping up over \$250 million in improvements, which include the creation of two new state parks (Summersville Lake State Park & the Elk River Trail), Cacapon Resort State Park's new lodge, renovations at every lodge and cabin in the system, hundreds of new campsites built or upgraded, new recreational facilities, and much-needed infrastructure upgrades systemwide.

Local tourism partners, educators, and entrepreneurs are more engaged in promoting the industry than ever before. Tourism's annual tourism conference saw record attendance last year, and all 55 county school systems in the state are implementing tourism and hospitality curricula in their course offerings.

Private investors are also helping to create much-needed visitor infrastructure to serve the additional travelers coming to West Virginia. The state further incentivizes this private development through the Tourism Development Act tax credit, one of the best tax credits of its kind in the nation. The levels of investment flowing through the credit in recent years reflect exponential growth in tourism in recent years, with the total investment throughout the program now topping \$357 million, and \$263 million (or 73%) of that recorded in the last five years alone.

Across the board, from increased public and private investment to the rapidly building momentum of the Almost Heaven campaign, the future is bright for tourism in West Virginia. Tourism is just getting started and is seeking a collaborative partner(s) to identify ways to capitalize on this momentum for West Virginia's tourism industry.

Proposed Scopes of Work

Tourism is seeking services for the three scopes of work outlined below.* The three scopes of work will be scored separately, but interested parties may bid on one or more depending on their areas of expertise.

*All scopes of work are subject to change pending final negotiations.



Proposed Scopes of Work

SCOPE ONE:

BRAND STRATEGY, CREATIVE & MEDIA BUYING

- Develop and implement cutting-edge advertising and marketing strategies to boost visitation and grow tourism's economic impact in West Virginia.
- Create and implement a media strategy designed to increase brand awareness and drive visitation, traveler spending and overnight stays.
- Oversee media buying and conversion-based strategies for West Virginia State Parks lodging and activity bookings.
- Manage and expand the approximately \$8 million annual [cooperative advertising program](#) for Tourism's brand campaign to secure buy-in from tourism partners, increase the overall reach of the state's campaign, and provide promotional support for individual partner messaging.
- Manage state-of-the-art processes for real-time monitoring and reporting of all advertising and visitation metrics.
- Propose and manage strategic partnerships with harmonious brands that elevate the Almost Heaven campaign and position West Virginia as a trusted vacation destination. An example of a past partnership can be found [here](#).
- Identify core market segments for targeted advertising. Additionally, develop strategies to cultivate new growth markets such as day trippers, national park visitation, rental properties, and outdoor recreation.
- Provide ongoing creative services for brand management and tourism advertising, including but not limited to digital, print, broadcast, streaming, outdoor advertising, etc.
- Assist in strategic long-term planning and research gathering.
- Develop and run a modern strategy for managing and leveraging first-party data in advertising.
- Develop strategies to promote tourism and hospitality as career fields in West Virginia and the surrounding region to help address the opportunity to fill 21,000 tourism and hospitality job openings annually through 2030.
- Oversee and execute a strategy for intellectual property, including music, video, and imagery.
- Assist with international marketing efforts and related projects in collaboration with Travel South USA and Brand USA.
- Other duties associated with brand marketing.

Proposed Scopes of Work

SCOPE TWO:

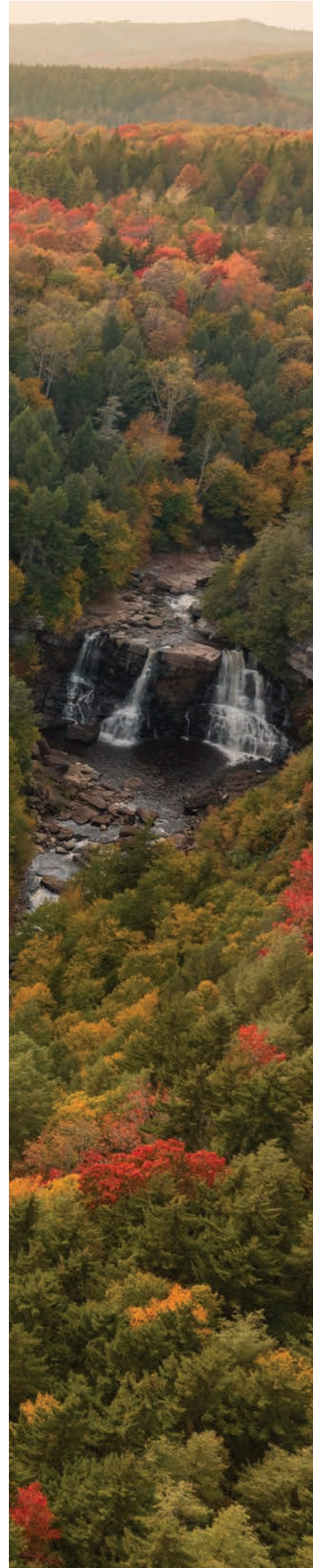
PUBLIC RELATIONS & EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

- Develop and implement cutting-edge earned media and experiential marketing strategies to make West Virginia a well-known destination and secure placements in top-tier publications.
 - Monitor media coverage and report results to Tourism and the wider team.
 - Recruit media members to attend familiarization tours across the state seasonally.
 - Identify public relations-related conferences, trade shows, events, and opportunities for Tourism to attend to share West Virginia with the world and create new relationships with media members.
 - Design and execute new mobile unit(s) to be utilized at travel shows, fairs, festivals, conferences, etc.
 - Implement cutting-edge experiential brand activations to introduce West Virginia to new markets and target audiences.
 - Other duties associated with earned media strategy, public relations, and experiential marketing.
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SCOPE THREE:

CONTENT & SOCIAL MEDIA

- Develop and implement cutting-edge content and social media strategies to boost visitation and grow tourism's economic impact in West Virginia.
- Prepare seasonal social media and content strategy plans with a focus on data-driven themes and goals. These plans should encompass email marketing, blogs, and social media themes.
- Develop and monitor a modern, dynamic, and always-on paid social media campaign for West Virginia Tourism and West Virginia State Parks.
- Lead strategy, targeting, and monitoring for partner social media ads as part of Tourism's public-private partnership cooperative advertising program.
- Develop best-in-class email and SMS marketing campaigns to leverage first-party data focusing on re-engagement and conversions.
- Plan and implement a data-driven content creator strategy to reach new social media audiences and develop new assets.
- Plan and execute seasonal content shoots to produce high-quality photo and video assets.
- Other duties associated with content strategy and social media.



Submitting an Expression of Interest

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:

The selection will follow the process set forth in the West Virginia [State Code](#) and linked in the Appendix.

There should be no communication related to this Expression of Interest outside of formal channels contemplated by this process. Those who have questions may submit them via email to Corey Pierce (contact information provided below) by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on July 24, 2024. Written answers will be publicly posted on our website in the [Purchasing & Procurement](#) section on July 31, 2024.

Finalist Vendors will be notified that they are invited to meet with Tourism's review committee in person in Charleston, West Virginia, to share the content of their proposal and work samples in an oral presentation format. These presentations will be scheduled for August 19-23, 2024.

DO NOT SUBMIT PRICING PROPOSALS as part of the initial application. This information will be requested during the negotiation process.

Proposal Format:

Expressions of Interest may be submitted electronically or by mail to the address below. If submitted via mail, please include five copies. Written questions should also be directed here. The required components to be submitted with the proposal are as follows: Part I, Part II; and at least one Part III (each Part is described in detail below), as applicable, depending on which scope(s) of work the Vendor is pursuing. In its entirety, the Vendor's proposal shall demonstrate how the West Virginia brand can be further leveraged to increase traveler spending.

Proposals should be submitted to:

Corey Pierce, Accounting Coordinator
West Virginia Department of Tourism
1900 Kanawha Blvd. E, Building 3, Suite 100
Charleston, WV 25305
Corey.R.Pierce@wv.gov

Selection Timeline:

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|--|-----------------------------|
| ■ Written questions submission deadline | July 24, 2024 at 5 p.m. ET |
| ■ Written answers provided | July 31, 2024 |
| ■ Expression of Interest submission deadline | August 7, 2024 at 5 p.m. ET |
| ■ Notify finalists for oral presentation | August 12, 2024 |
| ■ Oral presentations | August 19-23, 2024 |
| ■ Selection and negotiation process begins | August 26, 2024 |

Submitting an Expression of Interest

PART I:

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

Please include with the proposal a signed statement acknowledging that you meet the mandatory requirements, listing the requirements specified here, and adding any supplemental notes explaining how you meet or will meet these requirements.

- The Vendor must have a minimum of five years of experience in the applicable field.
- The Vendor must designate at least one dedicated full-time employee to serve as an account representative. A representative must be on call for emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a maximum response time of two hours.
- The Vendor must travel at the request of Tourism to and from Tourism's office. Travel-related expenses incurred are the responsibility of the Vendor and not reimbursable.
- The Vendor must have the financial capacity to execute the contract set forth by the Vendor and Tourism.
- The Vendor must ensure the total expenditures performed under the terms of this Contract do not exceed the amount set by Tourism unless such change is mutually agreed upon by the Vendor and Tourism.
- The Vendor must be capable of performing advertising services outside of the United States either in-house or through subcontractors. If Tourism desires marketing outside of the United States, the Vendor shall act in good faith with Tourism to establish an acceptable rate schedule.
- The Vendor must agree that all content developed by the Vendor under the terms of this Expression of Interest shall become the exclusive property of Tourism.
- The Vendor must be willing to work collaboratively with all other partners contracted to perform work for Tourism.

Failure on the part of the Vendor to meet any of these mandatory requirements shall result in the disqualification of the proposal. Tourism in its sole and absolute discretion will determine whether these mandatory requirements have been met.

Submitting an Expression of Interest

PART II: STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS

Company overview

- Provide Vendor's legal name, parent company(ies), ownership structure, and contact information for primary contact.
- Provide a list of all accounts gained and lost in the last 12 months with a description of why accounts were lost.
- Provide a list of the top five client campaigns with media budgets meeting the below budget benchmarks.
 - Brand Strategy, Creative & Media Buying – Budgets of \$3 million or greater
 - Public Relations & Experiential Marketing – Budgets of \$250,000 or greater
 - Content & Social Media – Budgets of \$500,000 or greater
- Provide the total number of employees and their locations.
- Provide the primary Vendor location that will be used to service Tourism, and a discussion of how Tourism's account would be serviced in Charleston, WV?
- Provide bios for the proposed account team that Tourism would be working with directly.
- Provide Vendor staff turnover rate for the last 12 months.
- Provide plans for subcontracting or partnerships that will be necessary to service Tourism.

Creative process

- Describe the Vendor's creative process.
- Provide two recent case studies illustrating how the Vendor's process led to results.

References

- Provide contact information for two clients that Tourism may contact. For each reference, please indicate the following:
 - Company name
 - Contact name and title
 - Contact phone number and email address
 - Type of service provided
 - Length of relationship

Potential conflicts of interest

- Please list any existing clients that could be considered a conflict of interest to Tourism. A conflict will not necessarily disqualify a Vendor; however, Tourism reserves the right to exclude a proposal from consideration at any time.

Submitting an Expression of Interest

PART III: WORK SAMPLES

Vendor will submit work samples applicable to the scope(s) of work the Vendor is interested in fulfilling. All Vendors will submit at least one Part Three.

Scope One: Brand Strategy, Creative, & Media Buying Work Sample

Propose strategic methods to increase visibility for the state of West Virginia, leveraging brand and creative strategy and media buying tactics.

- **Brand creative refresh:** Tourism is seeking a refreshed and reimagined next phase of the West Virginia brand. Analyze existing brand elements, including visual and conceptual changes to execute cutting-edge advertising and drive results. Provide recommended changes and justification.
- **Paid media strategy:** Propose a multifaceted campaign media plan using a sample budget of \$5 million, driven by stunning visuals and research-based concepts. Address the following areas.
 - **Creative samples:** Full-page print ad, outdoor, digital display advertising, broadcast concepts, storyboarding, and radio script.
 - **Audience segmentation:** Who would you propose Tourism target in its efforts? What software would you use for demographic and psychographic targeting? What weight would you give to each audience segment and why?
 - **Channels:** What is the Vendor's proposed media mix and why? How would these channels be used to drive traveler spending?
 - **Cooperative advertising opportunities:** Provide examples of advertising extensions for industry partners to be included in.
 - **Reporting:** What software would be made available for real-time reporting? How would you address ads that are not performing/delivering results?
- **Big ideas:** Propose two campaigns, strategic partnerships, or special projects that demonstrate the Vendor's ability to develop and execute big ideas.



Scope Two: Public Relations & Experiential Marketing Work Sample

Propose strategic ways to garner earned media attention for the state of West Virginia.

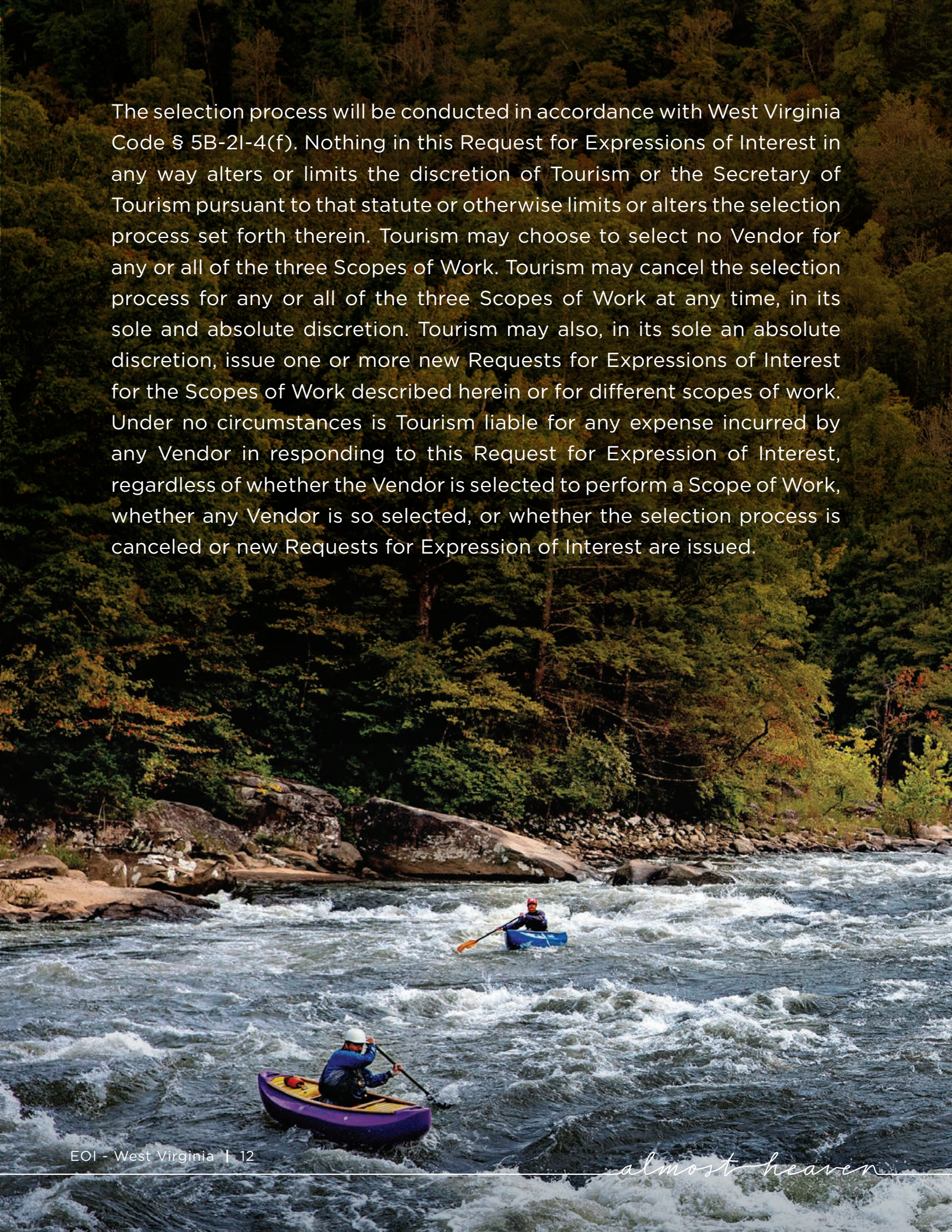
- **PR pitching:** Draft a pitch(es) that could be sent to media contacts to raise awareness for something new in the state or a hidden gem experience/location/restaurant, etc.
- **Media engagement activations:** What are some ways Tourism could creatively engage with the media? Develop strategies and create mockups for each idea. Please see the [Appendix](#) for an example.
- **Familiarization tours:** Tourism hosts 4-5 journalists on individual familiarization tours seasonally. Give a recommendation on ways to improve these efforts based on current trends and work Vendor has done previously.
- **Experiential marketing ideas:** What out-of-the-box marketing ideas could be used to attract new visitors to the state and immerse them in Tourism's brand? Please share creative ideas as well as a rationale to support each experiential concept.
- **Big idea:** Outside of the requested items, please provide one big idea for elevating the public perception of West Virginia.

Scope Three: Content & Social Media Work Sample

Propose strategic ways to enhance Tourism's social media and online presence using the bullet points below as a guide.

- **Social media audit:** Perform an organic social media audit of current @WVtourism Instagram content with recommendations.
- **Paid social media strategy:** Develop and present a month-long paid social media strategy with examples for August 2024, including a variety of media types, targeting recommendations, and multi-platform strategies (Meta, Instagram, & Pinterest). Please note: Tourism is not authorized to have a TikTok.
- **Marketing campaign:** Every month, Tourism receives marketing leads from various sources who have opted in to receive communications from us. Prepare a sample email and/or SMS marketing campaign to engage and convert these leads.
- **Content creator campaign:** Present a case study to illustrate past successful content creator campaigns.
- **Big idea:** Outside of the requested items, please provide a big-picture idea to move Tourism's social media and content strategy forward into the future.

The selection process will be conducted in accordance with West Virginia Code § 5B-2I-4(f). Nothing in this Request for Expressions of Interest in any way alters or limits the discretion of Tourism or the Secretary of Tourism pursuant to that statute or otherwise limits or alters the selection process set forth therein. Tourism may choose to select no Vendor for any or all of the three Scopes of Work. Tourism may cancel the selection process for any or all of the three Scopes of Work at any time, in its sole and absolute discretion. Tourism may also, in its sole and absolute discretion, issue one or more new Requests for Expressions of Interest for the Scopes of Work described herein or for different scopes of work. Under no circumstances is Tourism liable for any expense incurred by any Vendor in responding to this Request for Expression of Interest, regardless of whether the Vendor is selected to perform a Scope of Work, whether any Vendor is so selected, or whether the selection process is canceled or new Requests for Expression of Interest are issued.



Appendix

APPENDIX A:

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTION PROCESS

- [West Virginia Code § 5B-2I-4\(f\)](#)

APPENDIX B:

RESEARCH & REPORTS

- [2023 West Virginia Department of Tourism Annual Report](#)
- [2023 Longwoods Image & Advertising Awareness Research - General Population](#)
- [2023 Longwoods Image & Advertising Awareness Research - Media Targets](#)
- [2022 Longwoods International West Virginia Visitor Research](#)
- [2022 Statewide Economic Impact](#)
- [2022 Regional and County Economic Impact](#)

APPENDIX C:

PR EXAMPLES

- [Creative PR Example](#)
- [AllTrails Brand Partnership](#)
- [Experiential Campaign Example](#)

APPENDIX D:

MARKETING ELEMENTS

- [Brand Guidelines](#)
- [Logo & Design Elements](#)
- [Website](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [X](#)
- [Pinterest](#)

APPENDIX E:

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MATERIALS

- [2022 Tourism Workforce Needs Assessment Report](#)
- [Overview of WV Department of Tourism Workforce Initiatives](#)
- [Page for Job Seekers](#)

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Thank you.

