



TOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

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almost heaven

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SECTION ONE: PURPOSE, SCOPE & GOALS

The West Virginia Department of Tourism (Tourism) is soliciting expressions of interest for an economic development firm to assist the state in the marketing and recruitment of tourism investment. Tourism is seeking a full-service commercial real estate and economic development/redevelopment consultant with knowledge and experience over a broad range of tourism development projects.

THE SUCCESSFUL FIRM WILL ASSIST TOURISM IN:

- **Goal One:** Identifying and validating tourism product development priorities.
 - **Goal Two:** Represent the state in discovery conversations with targeted investors and developers, determining the best path forward.
 - **Goal Three:** Negotiating finalized contracts with those investors and developers, if applicable.
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SECTION TWO: BACKGROUND

Tourism in West Virginia has seen a major resurgence over the past eight 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.

The economic impact of tourism in West Virginia topped \$9 billion last year, 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 2024, research numbers show travelers in West Virginia spent 28.2% more than before the pandemic, dwarfing the U.S. travel spending increase of just 12.4% in the same timeframe.

TRAVELER SPENDING IN WEST VIRGINIA CONTRIBUTES SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE STATE'S ECONOMY:

- On average, visitors now spend \$18 million per day.
- Food and beverage spending now exceeds \$1.8 billion annually.
- Annual lodging spending surpassed \$900 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 60,000 West Virginia jobs, one out of every 15 in the state.
- Tourism jobs account for \$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.

This widespread support is evidenced by record-breaking levels of investment in our state parks and trail systems. West Virginia State Parks are 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 statewide conference saw record attendance last year, and all 55 county school systems in the state have implemented tourism and hospitality curricula in their course offerings. Governor Morrisey unveiled a free online hospitality training program in March, and in its first six months, the program issued more than 10,000 microcredentials to West Virginians eager to learn more about the tourism industry.

Private investors are also helping to create much-needed visitor infrastructure to serve the influx of 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, with the total investment throughout the program now topping over \$500 million. Notably, 75% percent of the total investment over the course of this 21-year old program was recorded in the last six 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.

Additional information on tourism in West Virginia can be found at WVtourism.com/research and WVtourism.com/press.

SECTION THREE: VENDOR QUESTIONS

Vendors may submit questions relating to this solicitation to the Department of Tourism. Questions must be submitted in writing. All questions must be submitted on or before the date listed below and to the email address listed below to be considered. A written response will be published in a solicitation addendum at WVtourism.com/purchasing if a response is possible and appropriate. Non-written discussions, conversations, or questions and answers regarding this Solicitation are preliminary in nature and are nonbinding.

The question submission deadline is December 4, 2025, by 4 p.m. and questions should be submitted by email to Junior Accountant Hanna Kroeger at Hanna.E.Kroeger@wv.gov. Responses will be posted by the end of the day on December 8, 2025 at WVtourism.com/purchasing.

SECTION FOUR: EXPECTATIONS OF BIDDER

The successful bidder shall demonstrate a deep understanding and knowledge of economic development in the travel and tourism industry, and possess extensive experience in assisting local teams with recruiting new investment and structuring incentives.

SECTION FIVE: PROPOSAL FORMAT

PART ONE: STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS

A. Firm Overview

- Provide the company's legal name, parent company, ownership structure and contact information for the primary contact.
- List the total number of employees, specifying which employees will work directly on this project scope if selected, and include senior staff and project lead bios.
- Explain the service your firm provides and the experience that could be brought to this project.

B. Agency Capabilities

- Describe your process for working with a new tourism client.
- Provide case studies for at least two current clients and how the firm has led them to success through attracting and negotiating new investment.

C. References

- Provide contact information for a current client and a former client 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
 - ☐ Brief explanation of relationship dissolution, if applicable

PART TWO: PROPOSAL

- Provide a process and plan for how your firm would recommend tackling this project to bring new tourism investment to West Virginia. Please include an initial list of the types of investments that West Virginia should target.
- Provide a one-page marketing proposal for how your firm would position West Virginia to potential investors and developers.
- Pricing information should **NOT** be included in the proposal. Pricing will be negotiated later in the process, as outlined below.

SECTION SIX: SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process will be in accordance with W. Va. Code § 5B-2I-4(f):

The Department of Tourism may engage and retain one or more advertising and marketing agencies, consultants, enterprises, firms, or persons, as deemed by the secretary, in his or her sole discretion, necessary or advisable to assist the department in carrying out its powers and duties as set forth in this article. In the procurement of advertising agencies, consultants, enterprises, or persons, from time to time, estimated to cost \$250,000 or more, the secretary shall encourage such advertising and marketing agencies, consultants, enterprises, firms, or persons to submit an expression of interest, which shall include a statement of qualifications, including anticipated concepts and proposed advertising, marketing and advertising campaigns. All potential contracts shall be announced by public notice published as a Class II legal advertisement in compliance with §59-3-3 of this code. A committee of three to five representatives of the department or the Tourism Advisory Council, as selected by the secretary, shall evaluate the statements of qualifications and other materials submitted by interested firms and select three firms which, in their opinion, are best qualified to perform the desired service. The committee shall then rank, in order of preference, the three firms selected and shall commence scope of service and price negotiations with the first-ranked firm. If the department is unable to negotiate a satisfactory contract with the first-ranked firm, at a fee determined to be fair and reasonable, price negotiations with the firm of second choice shall commence. Failing accord with the second-ranked firm, the committee shall undertake price negotiations with the third-ranked firm. If the department is unable to negotiate a satisfactory contract with any of the selected firms, the office shall select additional firms in order of their competence and qualifications, and it shall continue negotiations in accordance with this section until an agreement is reached.

To maintain transparency and consistency in the bidding process, Tourism intends to use this procedure, even if the contracted rate is less than \$250,000.

SECTION SEVEN: TIMELINE

The schedule for the process will be as follows:

Written Question Submission Deadline	4 p.m. EST, December 4, 2025
Written Answers Posted	December 8, 2025
Expression of Interest Submission Deadline	4 p.m. EST, December 12, 2025
Notify Finalists for Oral Presentation	Approx. December 15, 2025
Oral Presentations	TBD
Selection and Negotiation Process begins	Late December / early January 2026

SECTION EIGHT: SUBMISSIONS

Expressions of interest may be submitted electronically to Junior Accountant Hanna Kroeger at Hanna.E.Kroeger@wv.gov.