



POWERED BY
**Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority**

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR TOURISM-RELATED CAPITAL PROJECTS & MARKET ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Explore Asheville, powered by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, invites qualified consulting firms to submit proposals to conduct a Tourism Asset & Market Assessment. This study will identify, assess, and prioritize potential tourism-related capital projects with the greatest potential to drive visitor and event spending, supporting a wide variety of local businesses, increasing quality visitation, enhancing the visitor experience, and generating meaningful economic and community benefits in Buncombe County.

The goal of this assessment is to provide the authority and community partners with objective, data-driven analysis and a clear prioritization framework to guide future investment in large-scale tourism-related assets. While the Authority does not develop or operate projects directly, this assessment will shape future funding opportunities through programs such as the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and the Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT) Fund.

BACKGROUND

The Authority administers two dedicated funding programs—the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and the Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT) Fund. These programs provide financial support for tourism-related capital projects through grants, loan guarantees, or pledges of debt service. Their purpose is to stimulate increased visitation, generate overnight stays, advance economic development, and deliver long-term community benefits across Buncombe County.

Both funds are made possible entirely by lodging taxes paid by overnight visitors who stay in hotels, vacation rentals, and bed and breakfasts within Buncombe County. The use of these funds is governed by North Carolina state legislation and related guidelines. Eligibility to apply is limited to nonprofit organizations and government entities.

Since 2001, the Authority has invested nearly \$110 million in 55 community projects across Buncombe County through the TPDF and LIFT fund. These projects have included sports and recreation facilities, cultural and arts venues, outdoor amenities, and other large-scale assets that strengthen the region's travel and hospitality economy.

Based on an analysis of the visitor impact of previous TPDF investments and insights gathered through stakeholder engagement, the Authority convened a planning session with its volunteer leadership in March 2025 to identify capital project priorities for future grant cycles. During this session, the group identified several types of projects to prioritize investment, listed below in order of importance:

1. Large entertainment and cultural facilities
2. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities (including multi-use venues)
3. Family-friendly attractions and experiences

These project types were prioritized for their potential to create new jobs and wages for local residents, sustain employment within the travel and hospitality sectors, serve both resident and visitor audiences, generate incremental tax revenue for municipal partners, and retain local spending that might otherwise go to competing destinations.

As new opportunities emerge, the Authority seeks independent expertise to:

- Evaluate market demand and emerging trends
- Identify and prioritize high-potential tourism-related capital projects
- Recommend a framework for prioritization
- Provide guidance on financial and implementation considerations
- Assess the event landscape across the Southeast region to identify gaps, opportunities, and benchmark destinations related to the Authority's target project types, providing a recommended list of events that Buncombe County could competitively bid to host in the future.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected consultant will complete the following tasks:

1. Market Analysis

- Assess regional, state, and national tourism and event trends with relevance to Buncombe County
- Identify visitor demand drivers, target audiences, and emerging opportunities
- Evaluate gaps in current tourism facility offerings

2. Competitive & Comparative Analysis

- Benchmark Asheville/Buncombe County against peer and aspirational destinations
- Identify differentiators, strengths, and opportunities for positioning

3. Opportunity Identification & Prioritization Framework

- Define criteria for evaluating potential capital projects (e.g., economic impact, community alignment, sustainability, demand, readiness), that also aligns with existing legislative requirements outlined in [NC legislation H1057 \(Effective July 1, 2022\), pages 4-8](#), and with current program guidelines for both the [Tourism Product Development Fund](#), and [Legacy Investment from Tourism Fund](#).)
- Apply the framework to identify and prioritize categories of projects with the highest catalytic potential—building on the priority areas identified by Authority leadership, including large entertainment and cultural facilities, sports and recreation venues, and family-friendly attractions

4. Preliminary Financial Framework

- Provide order-of-magnitude capital cost estimates by project type
- Outline potential funding sources and partners as well as operating models
- Highlight long-term sustainability considerations (detailed pro formas not required)

5. Economic & Community Impact Assessment

- Estimate potential impacts on event recruitment, visitation, visitor spending, tax revenues, and job creation
- Assess alignment with organizational strategic imperatives, community values, sustainability commitments, and legislative requirements
- Conduct a high-level cost-benefit analysis for prioritized project categories

6. Implementation Considerations

- Identify key risks, barriers, and success factors for project development
- Recommend optimal governance and operating structures most appropriate for large-scale tourism-related capital projects
- Provide guidance on phasing and realistic timelines

7. Final Deliverables

- Comprehensive Tourism Asset & Market Assessment Report with executive summary
- Presentation of findings to Explore Asheville staff for review
- Supporting data sets, models, and prioritization framework, including potential events to pursue per project
- Presentation of findings to the Authority board during the Annual Planning Session

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Interested firms should submit proposals that include:

- **Cover Letter** – Statement of interest, understanding of the project, and unique qualifications.
- **Firm Qualifications** – Overview of the firm’s experience with tourism, destination development, or community infrastructure assessments, including work across a variety of project types (e.g., cultural, entertainment, sports, and family-oriented facilities). Include any relevant experience with post-disaster project development, engagement with federal funding or grant programs, and structuring or advising on public-private partnerships. Highlight at least three comparable studies that demonstrate versatility and cross-sector expertise.
- **Project Team** – Identification of key personnel, their roles, and relevant experience. Include résumés or short bios.
- **Project Approach & Work Plan** – Proposed methodology, timeline, stakeholder engagement strategy, and approach to delivering actionable recommendations.
- **Fee Proposal** – Detailed budget with cost breakdowns by task and personnel. Indicate any assumptions or potential additional expenses.
- **Past Work Examples** – Provide up to two examples of similar work (final reports, executive summaries, or case studies) that demonstrate your firm’s ability to evaluate and prioritize a range of project types and deliver high-quality, actionable recommendations.
- **References** – Contact information for at least two clients for whom similar work was performed, including name, title, organization, email, and phone number.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- **Relevant Experience & Qualifications** – Demonstrated expertise in tourism, destination development, or community infrastructure assessments; the strength of firm qualifications.
- **Project Team** – Experience and qualifications of key personnel assigned to this project.
- **Proposed Approach & Work Plan** – Quality, clarity, and feasibility of the proposed methodology, timeline, and engagement strategy.
- **Past Work Examples & References** – Quality and relevance of previous studies; feedback from past clients.
- **Fee Proposal** – Cost-effectiveness, clarity of budget, and overall value.

QUESTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

Firms may submit questions or requests for clarification regarding this RFP by email to Tiffany Thacker, Vice President, Partnership & Destination Management, at tthacker@exploreasheville.com no later than **Friday, November 14, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. EST.**

All questions must be submitted in writing; phone inquiries will not be accepted. Responses to all timely submitted questions will be compiled and posted as a written addendum to the Explore Asheville website by **Wednesday, November 19, 2025.**

PROPOSED TIMELINE

- **RFP Issued:** Friday, October 31, 2025
- **Questions Due:** Friday, November 14, 2025
- **Responses to Questions Posted:** Wednesday, November 19, 2025
- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** Friday, November 28, 2025
- **Firm Selected / Contract Awarded:** Friday, December 5, 2025
- **Project Kickoff:** Week of December 15, 2025
- **Draft Report Due:** Friday, February 20, 2026
- **Final Report & Staff Presentation:** Friday, March 13, 2026
- **Board Presentation (Annual Planning Session):** Friday, March 27, 2026

Firms are encouraged to propose a detailed project schedule within their work plan, identifying key milestones and deliverables.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

All proposals must be submitted electronically by Friday, November 28, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. EST.

Proposals should be submitted via email to: Tiffany Thacker, Vice President of Partnership & Destination Management at tthacker@exploreasheville.com. Subject Line: *RFP Submission – Tourism-Related Capital Project & Market Assessment.*

Each proposal must be submitted as a single PDF file that includes all required sections outlined in this RFP. File size should not exceed 25 MB. If attachments exceed this limit, firms may provide a file-sharing link (e.g., Dropbox, SharePoint, Google Drive, or similar).

Receipt of all proposals will be acknowledged by email. If you do not receive confirmation within one business day, please contact the email address above.

CONCLUSION

The Authority is committed to thoughtfully evaluating potential tourism-related capital projects that can enhance the visitor experience, strengthen Buncombe County's position as a premier destination, and generate lasting economic and community benefits. We look forward to reviewing your proposals and selecting a partner with the expertise, creativity, and vision to guide the future of tourism development in Buncombe County.