

**Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. dba VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY  
Request for Proposals (“RFP”) for Destination Strategic Planning, November 6,  
2023 (Proposals Due Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 4PM.)**

**□ Materials Provided as attachments is highlighted.**

VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY (“VSC”) invites submissions of proposals from qualified firms authorized to do business in the State of Florida for the creation of a destination strategic plan 2025-2030 for VSC and the community.

**Section A: Visit Sarasota County General Background**

1. VSC is a 501 (c) 6 corporation located in Sarasota, FL. VSC contracts with Sarasota County Government to provide tourism marketing and promotion services funded by a portion of the Tourism Development Tax (TDT) collected by all hotel and rental stays under six months in Sarasota County and four municipalities. VSC operates on an October 1-September 30 fiscal year.
2. VSC’s FY 2024 Annual Plan and Budget are included as an attachment.
3. The Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax (TDT) is a 6% tax paid by visitors staying in short term rentals for 6 months or less. This tax is collected entirely by the Sarasota County Tax Collector. As a Destination Management Organization (DMO), VSC receives a small percentage of the TDT for marketing purposes, and is not funded by any tax imposed on residents.
4. The mission of Visit Sarasota County is to make Sarasota County the must-experience destination on Florida’s Gulf Coast.
5. VSC's last Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan 2025) was created in 2018-2019. (Full version and summary version included as attachments.)
6. VSC conducts a variety of research including monthly visitor profiles, quarterly and annual in-depth visitor profiles, STR, emotional mapping, annual partner/membership surveys, focus groups etc. In addition, special studies have been conducted including a Sentiment. All of these studies will be available as part of the planning process.

**Section B: Scope of Services**

1. The VSC is soliciting proposals from qualified firms to provide services to the VSC, the VSC Board of Directors, and the local tourism industry partners in the creation of a Destination Strategic Plan 2030 (the “Plan”). The Plan will inform and guide the VSC as it creates priorities, tactics and goals for upcoming annual plans.
2. The selected firm will provide consulting, research, report writing and presentation services to the VSC to develop the Plan.
3. The Firm will provide the following services:
  - a. Lead the VSC Board of Directors at a strategic planning retreat held Thursday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at The Resort at Longboat Key Club from 8:30AM – 11AM.

- b. Interviews (can be via internet surveys, virtually, or in person) elected officials, County and Municipal staff members, VSC staff members, partners, key stakeholders and influencers.
- c. Tourism asset assessments.
- d. Research various destinations against which our area should compare and benchmark itself.
- e. Final presentation powerpoint and Plan.

### **Section C: Key Goals for the Plan**

1. Ensure that funding and program development are aligned among VSC, its partners, government entities, non-profits and that the Plan meets the long-term goals of the community.
2. Recommend actions to increase visitor flow across all segments (leisure, meetings, sports etc).
3. Assessment of the effectiveness of VSC's marketing programs and recommendations to improve these initiatives.
4. Review VSC Partnership Program and make recommendations on restructuring levels and benefits.
5. Assessment of the future needs of visitor services for Sarasota County.

### **Section D: Deliverables and Terms of Timeline**

1. VSC Executive Committee to review and choose firm at December 5, 2023 meeting.
2. Interviews Conducted December, 2023 through February, 2024.
3. Strategic Planning Session with the VSC Board on January 11, 2024 8:30AM – 11AM at The Resort at Longboat Key Club. (This date/location has been set and cannot be moved.)
4. An assessment of the effectiveness and adequacy of the current destination marketing program and recommended strategies to improve these initiatives. Particular emphasis should be provided on how the VSC can enhance these efforts to ensure growing visitation and visitor spending. This assessment should include recommended operating guidelines for the programs to achieve the desired development results under the contractual relationship between Sarasota County and VSC.
5. The strategic plan should be completed April 3, 2024 and presented to the VSC Board at the April Board Meeting which will be held April 11, 2024 8:30AM at the VSC Administrative Offices/1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room.
6. An evaluation of Sarasota County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

### **Section E: Budget**

1. It is envisioned that this project will span December, 2023 – April, 2024. The approved budget in FY 24 is \$50,000. VSC is asking firms for their pricing to complete the Plan by April, 2024. The cost of travel to Sarasota and work in Sarasota should be included in the overall firm fee.

### **Section F: Qualifications Sought**

1. In order to be considered a qualified supplier, all firms which VSC is considering to be included in this RFP should be normally engaged in performing the type of work specified by this Request for Proposal. Firms should ideally be engaged in this type of work for a minimum of five (5) years to be considered a qualified supplier.
2. Firm should be experienced working with tourism destination clients. Interested firms must be able to demonstrate measurable success in projects on behalf of tourism destinations.
3. Firm should have the size and resources to successfully handle the account the size of VSC.

### **Section G: Response Format and Deadlines**

1. Submission Deadlines: All respondents shall include one digital copy of the proposal on a USB containing a single PDF file which comprise the proposal and must be received no later than **November 27, 2023 at 4PM** at the administrative offices of VSC, 301 N. Cattlemen Rd, Ste 203, Sarasota, FL 34232. Responses received after that time shall be deemed invalid, unqualified responses, shall not be considered, and shall be discarded. It shall be the sole responsibility of the respondent to have its proposal delivered to VSC administrative office for receipt on or before the stated time and date.
2. Include in your proposal:
  - a. Overview of professional capabilities in performing duties outlined in the scope of services/key goals for plan. Include overview and professional experience of the staff that will be working on this account/project.
  - b. Provide at least two similar examples, executive summaries are acceptable, of past projects performed for destination marketing organizations. Details of examples can be provided as links in the proposal document.
  - c. Quote for performing the scope of services/key goals for plan.