



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Tourism Brand & Marketing Asset Development

Issued: August 31, 2026

Submit proposals to:

Jodi Nichols, LCEDA Executive Director
nicholsj@rightplace.org | 231.742.3328

with subject line: "RFP — Tourism Brand / Marketing — [Your Firm Name]"

Proposals Due: By 5pm October 1, 2026

Organization

1. Introduction & Overview

Lake County, with a year-round population of just over 13,000, welcomes several times that amount of people to its rural community throughout the peak tourism months of May – October. Besides its signature event, Blessing of the Bikes, held annually in May in the core community of Baldwin, visitors and seasonal residents are also attracted to the areas 151 lakes, rivers known internationally for trout fishing, and an exceptional ATV/ORV/Snowmobile trails system that covers the county and includes all roads except US 10 and M37. A growing number of visitors also enjoy the cultural offerings of the historic African American community of Idlewild.

Despite all of its natural assets and visitor attractions, Lake County's economy has struggled to grow. While tourism is the county's core economic driver, there are under 80 traditional lodging rooms within the county and no Visitors Bureau or Council exists. This has led to a lack of an established unified brand or any concentrated professional marketing effort to bring more visitors to the area. This project will be an important first step in bringing the marketing capacity of Lake County to the level of its neighboring communities.

In recent years, the Lake County Economic Development Alliance (LCEDA) – a volunteer-led non-profit focused on economic and community development – has partnered with The Right Place of Grand Rapids to provide economic and community development services countywide. This partnership has resulted in an increase in resources, funding and capacity. Recent notable community development projects include redevelopment of downtown blighted properties into restaurant and housing, launching of an outdoor market, development of one of only a few ORV training parks in the eastern U.S., and \$1M in community park improvements. Planned projects include development of an historic signage trail in Idlewild, municipal airport improvements, and additional redevelopment of commercial and public gathering space in downtown Baldwin. There is currently a significant amount of momentum and energy in Lake County, making this the perfect time to launch our brand as a thriving tourism destination. **The selected vendor(s) for this project will have the opportunity to define Lake County's destination identity for a growing number of visitors and residents!**

2. Project Purpose & Goals

Following recommendations from a 2025 Economic Diversification Study and recent work as a Community Growth Academy participant through the MI Office of Labor and Economic Opportunity, Lake County is establishing a county-wide tourism brand and the necessary marketing assets to promote the area and attract new visitors.

LCEDA Executive Director, Jodi Nichols (a Right Place staff member), will be leading this project on behalf of the county. Collaboration with Baldwin Downtown Development Authority, Lake County Chamber of Commerce, and other local partners will ensure successful implementation and a more cohesive approach to the look and use of current marketing assets, including Chamber of Commerce website - lakecountymichigan.org, LakeCoTrails social media page, and various community event marketing assets.

2.1 Primary Goals

- Development of a recognizable, marketable brand for Lake County tourism that reflects attributes described in overview above and appeals to associated target audiences, including:
logo, tagline, color palate, and branding guidelines
(Approved Name and Logo must be original and available for copyright/trademark)
- Development of marketing assets to promote the new brand to visitors, including:
tourism website with events calendar, community information kiosks using QR codes to engage with website, templates for various forms of communication

- Creation of tourism marketing campaign strategy that includes recommended tools, mediums, budget, vendors/partners

2.2 Key Performance Indicators

We will measure success by:

- Achievement of annual online engagement goals
- Increase in total number of visitors
- Increase in new visitors
- Increase in event attendees

3. Scope of Work

Vendors should propose a full-service engagement covering the following phases. Vendors may propose alternative phase structures if they believe it serves the project better — please explain your rationale.

3.1 Discovery & Strategy

- Tourism Stakeholder engagement sessions, interviews and surveys (work group, visitors, tourism businesses, municipalities/organizations)
- Inventory/evaluation of county's tourism assets
- Competitive analysis of peer tourism brand/marketing (regional, national)

3.2 Design

- Visual design concepts (minimum 2 directions) for logo, brand components, website visuals, and marketing templates; include demonstration of varied uses such as signage, online, advertising, promotional items
- Visitor Information Kiosk prototype design (minimum 2 directions) - including recommendations for build out

3.3 Marketing Campaign Strategy

- Marketing and advertising plan for visitor attraction, using developed assets
- Recommendation of target markets, publications, events, media outlets
- Templates for strategy components, including social media posts, e-newsletter, flyers, billboards

3.4 Website Development (may be proposed separately, through a subcontractor)

- Design of functional interactive website cohesive with developed branding that includes interactive event calendar, QR Code integration with community kiosks
- Quality assurance and testing, including security and optimization for site
- Client Training (minimum 2 sessions) on site management, including documentation
- 30-day post-launch support period

4. Project Timeline

The following is our target timeline. We are open to discussing adjustments with qualified vendors; please flag any concerns in your proposal. We expect the project to take approximately 12 months from contract execution to launch.

Milestone	Target Date
RFP Issued	Monday, August 31, 2026
Proposals Due	Thursday, October 1, 2026
Finalists Informed	Wednesday, October 7, 2026
Finalist Interviews / Presentations	Week of October 12, 2026
Vendor Selection & Contract Execution	By November 13, 2026
Kickoff Meeting	By December 4, 2026

5. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF document and include all of the following sections.

5.1 Firm Overview

- Company name, address, website, and founding year
- Firm size (number of employees / contractors)
- Organizational structure and key team members for this project
- Brief firm history and description of capabilities

5.2 Relevant Experience

- Minimum 3 portfolio examples of comparable projects, including: live URL, project description, scope of work performed, client name and contact (for reference), and year completed
- Prior experience with Tourism Marketing/Brand Development for non-metro community, economic development, government, or civic sector clients is strongly preferred — highlight any such engagements
- Experience with website development, hosting, management for tourism marketing entity strongly preferred for Scope of Work Item 3.4

5.3 Proposed Approach & Methodology

- Describe your process for discovery, design, and development
- Explain how you approach stakeholder engagement and feedback loops
- Describe how you manage projects and communicate with clients (tools, cadence, reporting)

5.4 Team & Staffing

- Identify the proposed team: project manager, lead designer, lead website developer, marketing strategist, and any other key roles
- Provide brief bios for each team member
- Specify whether any work will be subcontracted and to whom

5.5 Pricing & Budget

- Itemized project budget by scope (discovery, design, marketing, website)
- Identify any costs not included in the project fee (e.g., hosting, stock photography, third-party licensing)
- Optional: Monthly maintenance retainer pricing (if offering)
- Optional: Hourly rates for work outside project scope
- Payment schedule and term

Our anticipated budget range for this project is \$100,000 - \$150,000. Please design your proposal to fit within this range or explain if you believe the scope warrants falling outside of this range.

5.6 References

- Minimum 3 client references for comparable projects
- Include: name, title, organization, phone, email, and brief project description

5.7 Timeline Confirmation

- Confirm ability to meet our target launch date or propose an alternative schedule
- Describe any assumptions or dependencies that could affect the timeline

5.8 Terms & Disclosures

- Disclosure of any conflicts of interest
- Confirmation that the firm carries general liability, professional liability (E&O) insurance and Workers' Compensation.

6. Evaluation Criteria & Selection Process

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee. Finalists will be invited to present their proposals in person. We reserve the right to request additional information, negotiate terms, or reject any or all proposals.

Evaluation Criterion	Points	Weight
Relevant experience with comparable communities and projects	30	30%
Quality and creativity of design portfolio	25	25%
Proposed approach, methodology, and process	15	15%
Pricing and value relative to scope.	15	15%
Team qualifications and project management approach	15	15%
TOTAL	100	100%

Selection Process

1. Initial screening for completeness and eligibility
2. Scoring by Project Lead and County staff
3. Scores reviewed by selection committee
4. Finalist shortlist (typically 2–3 firms) invited to present to selection committee
5. Reference checks for finalists
6. Vendor selection and contract negotiation

7. Submission Instructions

Submission Deadline	Thursday, October 1, 2026 at 5:00 PM ET
Format	Single PDF, maximum 20 pages (excluding appendices and portfolio samples)
Delivery Method	Email to nicholsj@rightplace.org with subject line: "RFP — Tourism Brand / Marketing — [Your Firm Name]"
Questions	Submit questions by email to nicholsj@rightplace.org. Answers will be emailed to all applicants by September 24, 2026.
Late Submissions	Will not be considered
Proposal Validity	Proposals must remain valid for 90 days from submission deadline

8. Terms & Conditions

Right to Reject

Lake County reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, to waive irregularities or informalities, and to accept any proposal deemed to be in the best interest of the organization.

No Obligation to Proceed

Issuance of this RFP does not obligate RPI to award a contract or pay any costs incurred by vendors in preparing proposals.

Confidentiality

All proposals become the property of RPI and may be subject to public disclosure. Vendors should identify any sections they consider proprietary, though RPI makes no guarantee of confidentiality.

Contract

The selected vendor will be required to execute a professional services agreement that includes provisions for scope, deliverables, IP ownership (all custom work as work-for-hire), payment schedule, warranties, and termination. Key provisions include:

- All design and content produced under this contract shall be owned by Lake County
- Vendor shall carry general liability insurance
- Vendor shall not subcontract work without prior written approval
- Lake County may terminate for cause with 15 business days written notice

Appendix A: Additional Requirements Checklist

Vendors should confirm their proposal addresses each of the following. Include this checklist as a signed cover sheet with your proposal.

- Firm overview and history included
- Minimum 3 portfolio examples with live URLs and references included
- Proposed team bios and roles identified
- Subcontractors disclosed (or confirmed not applicable)
- Detailed, itemized budget by phase provided
- CMS recommendation with rationale included
- Accessibility compliance approach described
- Timeline confirmed or alternative proposed
- Minimum 3 client references included
- Insurance coverage confirmed
- Work-for-hire / IP ownership confirmed
- Conflicts of interest disclosed (or confirmed none)