



## Request for Proposal for Tourism Research Services

Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority, the official destination marketing organization for Transylvania County, NC, is inviting qualified firms to submit proposals for research services. **Two different research initiatives** are detailed in this request for proposal: a visitor profile study and a tourism partner study. Interested firms may submit separate proposals for one or both initiatives.

### Introduction and Background

Transylvania County is a spectacularly beautiful destination located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina along the state's southwestern border with South Carolina. The county includes many square miles of state and national forests and is bounded on the north by the National Park Service's Blue Ridge Parkway. The destination is known for its scenic and rugged mountain beauty, with peaks reaching over 6,000 feet elevation. Transylvania County also features one of the most beautiful lakes in the nation, Lake Toxaway, along its western side, and Gorges State Park in the same area. The area has long been known as the Land of Waterfalls.

Brevard, the county seat and Transylvania's largest community, has a charming and picturesque setting within the French Broad River valley. The town features numerous independent retailers and restaurateurs, craft studios, craft breweries, and is globally known for the Brevard Music Center. The Center's music education programs and performances attract students and large crowds every spring through the fall season.

The county is an outdoor recreation mecca for hiking, camping, cycling (both road and mountain biking), rock climbing, birding, and fly fishing. It also has one of the highest concentrations of summer camps in the country, attracting youth campers from around the world.

Transylvania County is less than an hour from the downtowns of both Asheville, NC and Greenville, SC, and is less than 30 minutes' drive from the Asheville Regional Airport, one of the fastest-growing airports in the nation. The county is easily accessible from major metropolitan areas like Charlotte and Atlanta, but draws visitors from across the southeast, including Florida. There is also a sizeable presence of second or vacation homes in the county. Visitation is almost entirely composed of leisure transient travelers. The county's primary destination competitors are other North Carolina mountain destinations of similar size or attributes, including Hendersonville, Maggie Valley and Waynesville, Boone and Blowing Rock, Sylva, Highlands, and Cashiers.

## **Situation Analysis**

While the county has long been an appealing destination for travelers, especially in the summer and fall when visitors are attracted by the area's cooler temperatures and scenic mountain beauty, the destination has boomed in popularity in recent years. Even before the pandemic, Transylvania County's outdoor assets attracted a growing number of both overnight visitors and daytrippers. These daytrippers comprise two audiences: those who are permanent residents of nearby markets like Asheville, Charlotte, and Greenville, and those who are visitors to the region staying overnight in nearby destinations.

This popularity has also placed a strain upon the same outdoor recreational assets that attract those visitors. Trails, waterfalls, and other sites within the Pisgah National Forest, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and DuPont State Recreational Forest have been overrun at times with visitors especially during the summer and fall, creating extraordinary demands upon forest managers and local emergency services. The management of these assets has become a critical issue for local, state, and federal government units, and for the TCTDA.

Like many other destinations during the pandemic, Transylvania County has also witnessed unprecedented demand for short-term rental lodging. The county has only a few traditional hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts, but possesses one of the largest concentrations of short-term rentals in the state. TCTDA does not subscribe to STR due to the destination not having a minimum number of hotel participants for STR reporting but does subscribe to AirDNA for short-term rental market metrics.

While the destination has seen increases in visitation year-round, there is an opportunity to increase off- and shoulder season visitation. TCTDA also wants to refine its target audiences and understand how to best target them. TCTDA has not undertaken a visitor profile study in several years, and the visitor makeup has likely changed substantially. New insights are needed to inform both destination marketing and destination management.

## **Part A: Request for Proposal for Visitor Profile Study**

TCTDA is seeking proposals for the execution of a visitor profile and segmentation study that should include (but is not necessarily limited to) the following points of interest:

- Demographic profile of visitors
- Motivations for visiting Transylvania County
- Seasonality differences
- First-time vs. repeat visitors
- Profiles of both daytrippers (including those visitors to the region who are staying overnight in other destinations) and overnight visitors
- Visit behaviors, including activities and attractions visited
- Segmentation by type of overnight lodging and length of stay
- Influence of summer camps, both in terms of legacy (did visitors come to camp as a youth) and whether recent visitors were parents dropping off kids at camps

- Visitor satisfaction
- Visitor expectations and perceptions of competitive destinations
- Appeal of attractions and activities currently offered in the county
- Potential appeal of activities and attractions that are yet to be developed and assets that are less utilized by visitors
- Why travelers don't visit Transylvania County and what barriers exist to visitation
- Barriers to visitation in the off- and shoulder season by recent visitors, including perceptions of weather as a barrier
- What can be done to increase the length of stay
- Understanding how visitors learned about the county as a destination and how they planned their visits

The anticipated market geography for this study is a five-hour (300 miles) driving radius of Brevard plus northern and central Florida. TCTDA can augment paid panel samples with an in-house email database of approximately 20,000 names. The use of mobile geolocation data to aid in the profile of visitor traffic is welcomed, although parts of the county do not have mobile device signal coverage due to rugged terrain and development protections. TCTDA welcomes recommendations for how to best execute this study and generate the insights needed for enhanced marketing and management of the destination. We are open to any methodology recommendations. A budget has yet to be determined for this initiative.

### **Proposal Requirements**

Proposals should be succinct and include the following:

- A detailed plan of work for methodology, execution, and final deliverables
- Project schedule, including when the firm can begin work
- Requests for information or materials from the TCTDA
- A fee proposal inclusive of all related costs, including any travel expenses
- The names of at least three client references and their contact information
- A list of recent destination clients

### **Selection Criteria**

Proposals received in response to this RFP will be reviewed by TCTDA staff and a board committee. Evaluation criteria include but are not limited to:

- The firm's ability to perform the scope of work based on prior experience with similar projects
- Appropriateness of the proposed methodology and approach to the project
- Anticipated insights generated from the approach
- Competitiveness of the proposed fee
- Client references

TCTDA is not obligated to select the lowest cost proposal. TCTDA reserves the right to refuse all proposals or to end the RFP process at any time. TCTDA may request interested firms make a brief virtual presentation of their proposal to staff and the board committee.

## **Deliverables**

Upon completion of the study, a presentation of results is expected to be provided to the TCTDA board and its staff, either virtually or in-person in Brevard. Final results and insights should be delivered via a PowerPoint presentation format. TCTDA may request additional insights such as specific cross-tabbed data in response to its questions.

## **Proposal Delivery Instructions**

Proposals must be received by 5:00 PM Eastern Time on May 20, 2022 and delivered via e-mail to TCTDA's supporting vendor for this project, Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group, who is working on behalf of the TCTDA. The final selection of a firm to execute this work will be made by TCTDA board and staff.

Chris Cavanaugh  
Magellan Strategy Group  
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(828) 651-9320

## **Questions**

All questions regarding this RFP should be addressed to Chris Cavanaugh via the above email address no later than one week prior to the proposal deadline.

## **Part B: Request for Proposal for Tourism Partner Study**

TCTDA is seeking proposals for the execution of a tourism partner study to collect input from Transylvania County tourism partners about the current state of the sector and to provide insight into the local visitor economy.

TCTDA is particularly interested in the following topics but welcomes input from interested firms on other subjects that could be addressed.

- Changes in customer behaviors and buying habits during the pandemic
- Strengths and weaknesses of the county as a destination
- Opportunities for growth in off- and shoulder seasons
- Concerns about the current state of the visitor economy
- Ideas regarding new product development or marketing initiatives

TCTDA will provide tourism partner names and contact information to the firm selected to execute this study. TCTDA welcomes recommendations for how to best execute this study and generate the insights needed for enhanced marketing and management of the destination. We are open to any methodology recommendations. A budget has yet to be determined for this initiative.

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