



EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP & COMPENSATION IN DESTINATION ORGANIZATIONS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

*A Destinations International and Destinations
International Foundation Research RFP*

Issue Date: March 2026

Response Deadline: April 17, 2026

RELEVANT INFORMATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Destinations International (DI) and the Destinations International Foundation (DIF) are commissioning a research initiative focused on executive leadership and compensation within destination organizations. This project aims to provide an informed, research-based understanding of compensation structures, leadership expectations, and accountability frameworks that influence the success of destination organizations globally.

The study will consider benchmarking executive compensation policies across USA, Canada and other global organizations (EU/MENA/AUS) to evaluate the link between leadership performance and community outcomes, and compare governance practices with those of other community-serving sectors. By commissioning this research, DI seeks to offer members, boards, and policymakers a credible framework to guide executive leadership decisions and strengthen understanding of the role destination CEOs play in advancing community wellbeing.

ABOUT DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL & THE DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

Destinations International (DI) is the global association for official destination organizations. DI serves as the collective voice and advocate for destination leaders and their teams, providing the knowledge, resources, and community needed to advance the success of destinations worldwide. Our membership includes destination organizations, partners, and strategic allies from across the globe who are committed to strengthening the role of tourism and destination stewardship as a force for community wellbeing and prosperity.

DI believes that destination organizations are essential to the vibrancy of the communities they serve. Through research, education, professional development, and global collaboration, DI equips its members to lead with vision, respond to evolving expectations, and deliver value for residents, visitors, businesses, and community partners. DI strengthens the influence and relevance of destination organizations by elevating standards of excellence and fostering a community of shared learning and support.

DI advances this work through four core pillars: Community, Destination Tools, Professional Development, and Advocacy and Research.

DI's 2026 Strategic Goals can be viewed [HERE](#).

The Destinations International Foundation (DIF) is a nonprofit organization that supports innovation, research, and talent development within the destination sector. The Foundation invests in programs and initiatives that expand knowledge, accelerate industry progress, and fuel the long term success of destination organizations around the world.

BACKGROUND

Chief Executives within the tourism and destination sector are facing increased attention regarding their salaries and overall compensation. In many cases, this attention is influenced by limited information or simplified narratives, particularly in media reporting and in conversations among elected officials, community leaders, and stakeholders.

Public discussions about nonprofit CEO compensation often do not reflect the full scope of the responsibilities, expectations, and outcomes associated with executive leadership. Destination organization CEOs operate in a unique environment where public accountability is paired with expectations that mirror the standards of high performing private sector executives. These leaders must balance governance requirements, community priorities, and a competitive marketplace.

Strong executive leadership is a core factor in the success of a destination organization. Effective CEOs attract investment, build strategic partnerships, set the organizational vision, strengthen local and global competitiveness, and lead teams that contribute to the long term vitality of their communities.

PROJECT SCOPE & DESCRIPTION

Destinations International seeks a qualified research partner to conduct a comprehensive examination of executive compensation within destination organizations. This work will provide a clear, evidence-based understanding of how compensation decisions are made, how they connect to leadership responsibilities and organizational outcomes, and how they align with norms across other community serving sectors. The goal is to equip destination organization boards, executives, and community stakeholders with research-based insights that strengthen transparency, accountability, and informed decision making.

The project will combine benchmarking, leadership outcome analysis, and governance evaluation to develop a complete view of how executive compensation is structured and understood within the sector. The research will explore compensation models, incentive structures, performance expectations, and the relationship between executive leadership and long term community impact. It will also examine governance practices such as the rebuttable presumption framework to provide clarity on how independent review, comparability data, and documentation support fairness and public trust.

To place destination organizations within a broader context, the research will include comparative analysis with other public goods institutions such as health systems, universities, cultural organizations, and nonprofit civic entities. This will allow the findings to reflect a realistic understanding of transparency norms, public expectations, and the standards used to evaluate leadership performance in related fields.

The research partner is encouraged to use a mix of methodologies that may include quantitative benchmarking, qualitative interviews, case studies, document review, or other approaches that best support a thorough analysis. The final work should present findings across different destination organization sizes and types, recognizing the variation in budget levels, governance structures, funding models, and community priorities.

PROJECT SCOPE & DESCRIPTION cont.

The completed research should produce actionable insights and practical guidance that destination organization boards and executives can use to strengthen communication, reinforce responsible governance, and help their communities understand the value and impact of strong leadership.

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY FOR THE PROJECT SCOPE

1. Analyze the Elements of a Typical Compensation Attack

The research should provide a clear and comprehensive examination of the most common themes that shape public criticism of executive compensation within destination organizations. This includes:

- Public funding and stewardship concerns and the perception that tax supported resources require a heightened level of justification
- Questions of value and accountability and how community members assess the return on investment delivered by destination organizations
- Equity and optics concerns that arise from comparisons to local wage conditions, community challenges, and broader economic inequality

This analysis should reflect the specific nuances of destination organizations and highlight how misconceptions or incomplete information contribute to these narratives.

2. Examine Industry Norms and Sector Expectations

The research should establish a clear understanding of compensation norms within the destination sector and within comparable sectors that serve a public good. This includes:

- Benchmarking practices used across destination organizations with consideration for budget size, staff size, governance model, and market type
- Comparisons to other public goods institutions such as universities, health systems, cultural organizations, and nonprofit civic institutions
- Insights into transparency norms and the expectations placed on publicly visible leaders across these sectors

The goal is to situate destination organization CEOs within an appropriate and credible context of peer institutions.

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY FOR THE PROJECT SCOPE cont.

3. Identify the Outcomes Boards Reward in Executive/Fiscal Leadership

The research should identify the performance outcomes and leadership qualities that boards consider when determining executive compensation. Areas of exploration may include:

- Organizational impact and measurable improvements in the visitor economy and community vitality
- Leadership effectiveness related to strategy, team performance, stakeholder management, and long term organizational resilience
- Contributions to mission advancement, community well being, and destination competitiveness
- Long term indicators such as reputation, resident sentiment, partnership strength, and institutional stability
- This component should help strengthen understanding of how leadership outcomes align with compensation decisions.

4. Assess the Rebuttable Presumption Framework and Governance Practices

The research should explain the principles and requirements associated with the rebuttable presumption of reasonableness and its relevance for destination organizations. This includes:

- The use of an independent body to review and recommend executive compensation
- The importance of comparability data that reflects organizations with similar size, mission, and region
- Documentation practices that demonstrate independence, due diligence, and fairness
- The findings should guide boards toward practices that reinforce transparency, accountability, and community trust.

5. Present Findings Across Different Destination Organization Sizes and Types

To ensure relevance and applicability, the research should segment findings across a variety of destination organization structures. This may include:

- Budget size categories
- Funding models such as public, private, or blended
- Governance structures including nonprofit and quasi public entities
- Community and market characteristics
- This segmentation will allow Destinations International to provide tailored insights that reflect the diverse operating environments across the sector.

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY FOR THE PROJECT SCOPE cont.

6. Deliver Actionable Insights and Recommendations

The final deliverables should offer clear and accessible findings that can be used by boards, executives, and community stakeholders. This includes:

- Research based explanations that help contextualize executive compensation
- Strategies for communicating the role, value, and responsibilities of destination organization CEOs
- Recommendations for strengthening governance, transparency, and public understanding
- Opportunities to align executive compensation conversations with community outcomes and long term organizational impact

INTENDED USE OF RESEARCH

The findings from this study will serve as a foundational resource for the destination sector by providing credible, research based clarity on executive compensation and leadership expectations. Destinations International intends for this work to support the people and institutions that guide and influence destination organizations at the local, regional, and national levels.

The research will provide destination organization boards with trusted references that strengthen their ability to evaluate executive leadership through fair, informed, and transparent processes. By presenting comparable data, governance standards, and examples from other community serving institutions, the study will help boards ground their decisions in evidence rather than perception. It will also support them in responding effectively to questions regarding stewardship, community value, and public accountability.

The study will equip CEOs with communication frameworks that help explain the responsibilities, expectations, and outcomes associated with their role. These frameworks will help leaders articulate the connection between executive performance, organizational success, and community benefits. They will also support CEOs in navigating moments of scrutiny by providing clear explanations that align compensation with mission advancement, public value, and long term community vitality.

The research will inform policymakers, civic leaders, and elected officials by offering a balanced and accessible understanding of how destination organizations operate and why strong executive leadership matters. This includes insights into public goods comparisons, transparency norms, and the governance practices that protect community resources. The work will contribute to more productive conversations about the role of destination organizations in economic development, community well being, and public service.

Finally, the study will support the ongoing research, advocacy, and professional development programs of Destinations International. The findings will inform future training, board development resources, communication tools, and policy work. They will also strengthen DI's ability to help members navigate public narratives, clarify the complexity of destination leadership, and reinforce the sector's shared commitment to community value.

PROPOSAL REQUEST

Destinations International invites qualified research firms, academic partners, or consulting organizations to submit proposals. Proposals should demonstrate expertise in executive compensation, leadership evaluation, nonprofit management, or related disciplines. High considerations for organizations with experience in understanding Destination Organizations as well as the broader tourism industry. As well as experience in the tourism industry outside the USA.

SUBMITTAL DETAILS

Proposals should include: statement of understanding, methodology description, qualifications, timeline, deliverables, and budget.

Budget Expectation: The target project budget is \$50,000 USD. Destinations International will consider proposals that outline a cost effective approach aligned to the project goals. Preference may be given to partners in good standing with Destinations International. Proposals may also include additional options for in kind contributions or services that support the successful delivery of the project.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on qualifications, methodology, relevance, budget, timeline, and collaboration capability.

DELIVERABLES

A comprehensive final written report, fully formatted and branded to Destinations International standards, suitable for publication and external distribution.

- A professionally designed executive summary that synthesizes key findings for destination organization boards, CEOs, and stakeholder audiences.
- A slide presentation of findings developed using the approved Destinations International PowerPoint template, for use at DI events and member education sessions.
- Transfer of all source files for the report and presentation in editable formats, including Word and PowerPoint versions, to support ongoing use and updates by the Destinations International team.
- Participation in at least one virtual briefing session with Destinations International staff to review key insights, narrative framing, and messaging.

TIMELINE

RFP Issued: March 2026

Q&A Period through March 31st: All questions to be shared/sent to Destinations International CC: Andreas Weissenborn

Response Deadline: April 17th

Vendor Selection: Week of May 8th

Final Report/Preview: 2026 DI Annual Convention/Summer 2026

CONFIDENTIALITY EXPECTATIONS

The selected vendor must maintain confidentiality of sensitive data and anonymize participants unless explicit consent is provided.

PROPOSAL INCLUSIONS

Proposals must include: overview, methodology, team bios, relevant studies, and confidentiality assurance.

CONTRACT TERMS

The final agreement will cover duration, services, payment, confidentiality, data protection, intellectual property, termination, and liability.

QUESTIONS

For inquiries, contact:

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