



DEFUNDING, DEVALUING AND DISRUPTING DESTINATION PROMOTION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

*A Destinations International and Destinations
International Foundation Research RFP*

Issue Date: June 9, 2026

Response Deadline: July 31, 2026

RELEVANT INFORMATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Destinations International and the Destinations International Foundation are commissioning a landmark research initiative focused on the consequences of defunding, devaluing, diverting, privatizing or otherwise disrupting destination promotion and destination organization functions within communities.

For decades, the destination sector has looked to the Colorado case as one of the clearest illustrations of what can happen when destination marketing investment is eliminated. That study documented a steep decline in Colorado's tourism market share and visitor spending after state tourism funding was reduced to zero and it has remained one of the most frequently cited cautionary examples in the field.

Destinations International now seeks a modern successor to that work. This project will examine contemporary cases and develop a broader evidence base that reflects today's environment, including shifting public expectations, post pandemic realities, governance changes and increasing scrutiny of the role destination organizations play in their communities.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what happens to a community when destination promotion is weakened, defunded, displaced or separated from its broader place based purpose. In addition to economic and visitor economy impacts, the study should examine broader effects on business performance, destination competitiveness, community prosperity, stakeholder alignment and the public value delivered by destination organizations.

By commissioning this research, Destinations International seeks to equip destination leaders, boards, policymakers, funders and community stakeholders with credible, practical and research based guidance that can help inform local decision making and strengthen understanding of why destination organizations matter.

ABOUT DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL & THE DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

Destinations International 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.

The Destinations International Foundation 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

For more than 30 years, the destination sector has looked to Colorado as a defining case study in the consequences of cutting destination promotion. In that case, the elimination of the state's tourism marketing budget in 1993 was followed by a significant loss in domestic tourism market share, major annual revenue declines and an unsuccessful effort to replace coordinated public destination promotion with a private sector model. Funding was later restored and subsequent evaluation demonstrated strong returns on renewed investment.

That body of work remains highly relevant, but the operating environment for destination organizations has evolved considerably. Today, destination organizations face a wider range of risks and disruption scenarios. These may include direct defunding, budget reductions, diversion of dedicated revenues, procurement or rebidding of core services, privatization pressures, governance restructuring, reputational attacks and the devaluing of destination promotion as a community serving function.

Recent years have introduced additional pressures. The COVID 19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of tourism dependent funding models and heightened public scrutiny around organizational purpose, resource allocation and community value. At the same time, several communities have experienced high profile disputes or structural changes involving destination organizations, their funding or the continuity of their services. The destination sector would benefit from a modern body of research that reflects these contemporary realities while preserving the credibility and lessons of the Colorado precedent.

Due to the sector significance and enduring influence of the original Colorado study, proposals that demonstrate an understanding of that body of work will be strongly valued. Destinations International considers it highly recommended that respondents incorporate, leverage or consult with Longwoods International in some capacity as part of the proposed approach, whether through direct collaboration, methodological consultation, historical context or another relevant contribution. This recommendation reflects the importance of ensuring that any modern successor is informed by the legacy, credibility and sector relevance of that foundational work.

Destinations International values a collaborative approach to such a unique and valued piece of research for the industry. In this context, Destinations International seeks a research partner to build a modern, evidence based understanding of what communities stand to lose when destination promotion is weakened or disconnected from its broader public purpose. The intent is not only to measure changes in visitation or spending, but also to better understand how such disruption affects destination prosperity (economic, social, cultural), business confidence, destination competitiveness, community alignment and the ability of a place to speak with one coordinated voice.

PROJECT SCOPE & DESCRIPTION

Destinations International seeks a qualified research partner to conduct a comprehensive examination of the impacts associated with defunding, devaluing, diverting, privatizing or otherwise disrupting destination promotion and destination organization functions.

This work should provide a clear, evidence based understanding of what happens when destination organizations lose funding, capacity, authority, alignment or continuity in the communities they serve. The goal is to produce a modern body of research that helps destination organizations, boards, elected officials, policymakers and community stakeholders understand both the measurable and less visible consequences of weakening destination promotion.

The project should combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to develop a complete and practical view of the issue. Economic and visitor economy analysis will be essential, but the research should also explore impacts on local business performance, destination competitiveness, civic alignment, reputation and other indicators of community prosperity and resilience.

To place the findings within a broader and more useful context, the research should examine multiple forms of disruption, including but not limited to budget cuts, elimination of tourism promotion funding, diversion of dedicated tourism revenues, outsourcing or rebidding of destination services, organizational restructuring and other circumstances that materially reduce the capacity of a destination organization to fulfill its mission.

The selected research partner is encouraged to use a mix of methodologies that may include econometric analysis, comparative case studies, interviews, stakeholder engagement, document review, peer market comparisons and other approaches that best support a thorough and credible analysis. The final work should present findings in a way that reflects the spread of destination organizations across size, geography, funding model, governance structure and community context. Understanding a core set of these issues resides within the North America, the results should try to reflect an application for any destination organization.

The completed research should produce actionable insights and practical guidance that destination leaders and their stakeholders can use to better understand risk, strengthen advocacy and respond more effectively when destination promotion is challenged.

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY FOR THE PROJECT SCOPE

1. Examine the Economic and Market Effects of Destination Promotion Disruption

The research should provide a rigorous analysis of the economic and market level consequences that may follow the weakening or elimination of destination promotion. Areas of examination may include:

- Changes in visitation volume and market share
- Visitor spending and tax generation
- Changes in traveler mix, yield, length of stay and seasonality
- Effects on meetings, events and group business
- Lodging and related visitor economy performance
- Destination competitiveness (see prosperity above) relative to peer markets

This component should help establish a modern evidence base comparable in relevance to the historic Colorado case.

2. Assess the Broader Community and Business Impacts

The research should move beyond visitation and economic output alone to evaluate broader community implications when destination promotion is diminished. Areas of exploration may include:

- Effects on small businesses, attractions, restaurants and retailers
- Downtown or district vitality
- Employment and workforce related impacts
- Business confidence and investment sentiment
- Stakeholder coordination and partnership strength
- Long term implications for local prosperity and resilience

This analysis should help clarify how destination organizations contribute to a broader ecosystem of community benefit.

3. Analyze Different Forms of Disruption

The study should examine the range of ways destination promotion may be weakened or displaced. This may include:

- Full or partial defunding
- Diversion of dedicated tourism related revenues
- Outsourcing, procurement or rebidding of services
- Privatization or quasi privatization of destination functions
- Governance restructuring or fragmentation
- Political or public devaluing of destination organization roles

The goal is to distinguish how different forms of disruption affect communities and whether certain risks produce different types of consequences.

4. Develop Case Studies of Contemporary Examples

The research should include a set of case studies that illustrate recent or modern examples of destination promotion disruption. These may include communities where destination services were reduced, rebid, restructured or placed under significant threat. Each case study should, to the extent possible, examine:

- The local context and precipitating issue
- The nature of the disruption
- Changes in economic, business, civic or organizational outcomes
- Stakeholder response and community narrative
- Recovery efforts, lessons learned and implications for other destinations

Destinations International is particularly interested in practical case study material that members can reference in future advocacy and education efforts.

5. Identify What Is Lost When Place Based Coordination Is Weakened

The research should assess the less tangible but highly important role destination organizations play as coordinating entities for their communities. Areas of exploration may include:

- Ability to align public and private stakeholders
- Loss of a unified destination voice
- Reduced strategic continuity and institutional memory
- Challenges in representing the broader community interest
- Impacts on destination reputation, positioning and long term relevance

This component should help articulate why the value of destination organizations extends beyond marketing activity alone.

6. Present Findings Across Different Destination Organization Sizes and Types

To ensure broad relevance, the research should segment or interpret findings across a range of destination organization characteristics. This may include:

- Budget size categories
- Market size and visitor economy dependence
- Funding models such as public, private or blended
- Governance structures including nonprofit, public authority, quasi public or contracted entities
- Geographic or destination type differences (geolocation, budget size, operational scope and responsibility etc.)

This approach will allow the findings to be more actionable for the diverse environments in which DI members operate.

7. Deliver Actionable Insights and Recommendations

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

- Research based explanations of what is at risk when destination promotion is weakened
- Practical messaging and advocacy guidance
- Warning indicators and early signals that a destination may be at risk
- Considerations for governance, funding stability and community communication
- Recommendations that support recovery, resilience and stronger public understanding

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 the consequences of disrupting destination promotion and destination organization capacity.

Destinations International intends for this work to support destination organizations and their boards as they navigate funding threats, procurement challenges, governance shifts, public scrutiny and broader questions about organizational value. The study should help leaders better explain the role destination organizations play in community prosperity, competitiveness and long-term resilience.

The research will also support conversations with policymakers, civic leaders, business partners, media and funding stakeholders by offering practical and evidence-based examples of what communities may lose when destination promotion is diminished or disconnected from its broader purpose.

In addition, the findings will inform DI's broader advocacy and research work, including future educational content, member tools, messaging resources and response frameworks designed to help destination organizations facing periods of uncertainty or challenge.

Ultimately, this study is intended to become a modern reference point for the destination sector, similar in long term relevance to the Colorado case, but broader in scope and more reflective of today's realities.

PROPOSAL REQUEST

Destinations International invites qualified research firms, academic partners or consulting organizations to submit proposals. Proposals should demonstrate expertise in tourism economics, destination research, public policy analysis, community-based research or related disciplines.

High consideration will be given to organizations with experience in destination organizations, visitor economy analysis, public sector or nonprofit governance and mixed method research design. Experience examining complex, politically sensitive or community facing issues will also be valued.

SUBMITTAL DETAILS

Proposals should include:

- Statement of understanding
 - Proposed methodology and research design
 - Qualifications and relevant experience
 - Preliminary case study approach
 - Timeline and workplan
 - Deliverables
 - Budget
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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Qualifications and relevant sector experience
 - Methodological rigor and credibility
 - Understanding of the issue and research purpose
 - Ability to measure both economic and broader community impacts
 - Quality and practicality of the case study approach
 - Relevance of proposed deliverables
 - Budget and value
 - Timeline and collaboration capability
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DELIVERABLES

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

Additional deliverables should include:

- A professionally designed executive summary that synthesizes key findings for destination organization boards, CEOs, policymakers 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
 - Optional recommendations for advocacy ready companion materials, such as talking points, case study briefs, or summary graphics
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TIMELINE

- **RFP Issued:** June 9, 2026
 - **Q&A Period through :** July 10, 2026 (note, all intended questions meant for Longwoods international should be mediated through Destinations International)
 - **Response Deadline:** July 31, 2026
 - **Vendor Selection:** Week of August 19th
 - **Draft Findings or Preview:** Advocacy & Action Summit, Ottawa ON, October 20-22 2026
 - **Final Report:** By November 30, 2026
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CONFIDENTIALITY EXPECTATIONS

The selected vendor must maintain confidentiality of sensitive data and anonymize participants unless explicit consent is provided. Proposals should explain how the research team will protect case study participants, interview subjects and any confidential or sensitive information shared during the project.

PROPOSAL INCLUSIONS

Proposals must include:

- Overview of the proposed approach
 - Methodology
 - Team bios
 - Relevant examples of prior studies or projects
 - Proposed case study framework
 - Budget and timeline
 - Confidentiality assurance
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BUDGET EXPECTATIONS

The target project budget is \$100,000-150,000 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

CONTRACT TERMS

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

CONTACT & RESPONSE

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RFP DUE DATE: July 31, 2026 (full schedule above on pg. 9)



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