



2027 DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL FUTURES STUDY

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

*A Destinations International and Destinations
International Foundation Research RFP*

Issue Date: July 27, 2026

Response Deadline: September 18, 2026

RELEVANT INFORMATION

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Destinations International is the global trade association for destination organizations, convention and visitors' bureaus, tourism boards, and the professionals who advance the visitor economy in their communities. Destinations International serves as a leading resource for destination organization leadership, advocacy, research, education, professional development, and industry best practices.

Through its work, Destinations International supports destination organizations of all sizes and geographies as they navigate evolving expectations from residents, elected officials, business leaders, civic partners, visitors, and other stakeholders. The organization's research and advocacy agenda is designed to equip destination leaders with timely insights, practical tools, credible data, and strategic resources that help demonstrate the value of destination organizations and strengthen the communities they serve.

The 2027 Destinations International Future Study will be supported by the Destinations International Foundation, which invests in research, education, innovation, and resources that advance destination organizations and the broader destination sector.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Destinations International is seeking proposals from qualified research, consulting, academic, or strategic advisory partners to support the development of the 2027 Destinations International Future Study.

The Future Study is a long-standing sector research initiative that Destinations International has facilitated for more than 40 years. It is designed to help destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus, tourism boards, and their professionals understand the trends, challenges, opportunities, and strategic priorities shaping the future of the sector.

In recent years, the study has been conducted through the DestinationNEXT platform, with MMGY NextFactor administering the survey process and supporting the development of recent editions. Beginning with the 2027 edition, Destinations International will open the project to a competitive bid process as the 2027 Destinations International Futures Study.

This transition provides Destinations International to evaluate new approaches to global survey research, stakeholder engagement, sector analysis, strategic interpretation, report development, translation, and member facing deliverables.

Prior editions have served as strategic road maps for destination organizations, identifying major trends, opportunities, strategies, future facing organizational roles, and changing measures of success. The 2014 study established a framework that assessed trends based on their likely impact and the degree to which destination organizations could influence or respond to them. Subsequent editions expanded the

methodology by incorporating global surveys, advisory input, stakeholder interviews, trend analysis, future maps, strategic frameworks, evolving roles, key performance indicators, and regional comparisons.

More recent editions have reflected the sector's expanding focus on community and destination development, evolving mandates, new key performance indicators, public funding, resident engagement, destination stewardship, artificial intelligence, sustainability, social impact, values based marketing, destination alignment, and the role of destination organizations as community leaders.

The 2027 Futures Study should build from this history while reflecting the current and future needs of destination organizations in a rapidly changing global environment.

PURPOSE AND STRATEGIC INTENT

The purpose of the 2027 Destinations International Futures Study is to provide a comprehensive, credible, and actionable assessment of the future of destination organizations and the broader visitor economy.

At its core, the study should serve as a large-scale sector research project that identifies the forces shaping destination organizations, the opportunities and threats facing the sector, and the practical strategies destination leaders can use to strengthen their organizations, stakeholders, and communities.

The study should help answer questions such as:

- *What are the most significant trends shaping destination organizations and the visitor economy?*
- *How are the roles, responsibilities, and mandates of destination organizations changing?*
- *What opportunities and threats should destination leaders be preparing for over the next several years?*
- *How are destination organizations contributing to community vitality, quality of life, economic opportunity, place stewardship, and resident benefit?*
- *What strategies should destination organizations prioritize to remain relevant, valued, resilient, and effective?*
- *How should destination organizations measure success in an expanded operating environment?*
- *How can the sector better communicate its value to residents, elected officials, civic leaders, business partners, and other stakeholders?*
- *How can destination organizations use research, data, storytelling, and strategy to support long term community vitality?*

COMMUNITY VITALITY WHEEL AS AN ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK

The 2027 Futures Study should incorporate Destinations International's Community Vitality Wheel as an overarching framework for the project.

The Community Vitality Wheel reflects the broader work of destination organizations across brand management, place stewardship and investment, promotion and sales, and the connected cycle of visit, live, work, and invest. The framework is rooted in the idea that if a community builds a place where people want to visit, it also builds a place where people want to live. If it builds a place where people want to live, it builds a place where people want to work. If it builds a place where people want to work, it builds a place where businesses and residents want to invest. If it builds a place where businesses and residents want to invest, it strengthens the conditions that make people want to visit.

The selected partner should propose how this framework can inform the research design, stakeholder engagement, analysis, narrative, and final deliverables. The framework should not simply be referenced in the final report. It should help shape the way the study explores the evolving value, function, and Futures role of destination organizations.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE DestinationNEXT ASSESSMENT TOOL

The 2027 Destinations International Futures Study will have an important relationship to the DestinationNEXT Assessment Tool (may be referred to throughout this RFP by its existing name for context; this tool may ultimately be renamed as part of its redevelopment). While the Futures Study and the Assessment Tool are connected, they are distinct initiatives with different purposes, uses, and outputs.

The Futures Study is intended to provide a broad, sector wide view of the trends, forces, opportunities, threats, strategies, and evolving roles shaping the future of destination organizations and the visitor economy. Its findings are expected to serve as a key influence on the continued evolution of a DI Assessment Tool, but they will not be the sole influence. The Assessment Tool will continue to be informed by additional research, practitioner input, member feedback, assessment results, strategic priorities, and the practical needs of destinations using the tool.

The current DestinationNEXT Assessment Tool presents a framework that destination leaders and communities can use to critically assess their destination. It is designed to help start a conversation, build alignment, identify areas of strength and opportunity, and provide focus on what needs to be done in the future. More than 330 destinations from 18 countries have utilized DestinationNEXT Assessment Tool to strategically assess their destinations.

The current assessment framework is based on 24 variables related to destination strength and community support and engagement. Within each variable, a series of metrics may also be identified, allowing destination organizations to gather data and provide a more in depth look at each variable.

The current model is built upon two key inputs:

- An assessment of how important each variable is to the destination.
- An assessment of the destination's perceived performance across each variable.

These assessments are combined and result in the destination being plotted in one of four scenarios:

- Explorer: Weak destination strength and weak community support.
- Voyager: Weak destination strength and strong community support.
- Mountaineer: Strong destination strength and weak community support.
- Trailblazer: Strong destination strength and strong community support.

A diagnostic report card is produced, outlining the results for each variable and showing how the destination compares to the industry average. In cases where multiple stakeholders complete the assessment, a standard deviation may also be reported so that destination organizations can understand the level of consensus across participants.

Respondents should describe how the 2027 Futures Study can be designed in a way that informs the redevelopment of a DI Assessment Tool while preserving the autonomy and integrity of both initiatives. This may include recommendations on how study findings could help validate, refine, or contextualize assessment variables, identify emerging dimensions for future consideration, support benchmarking, or strengthen the connection between broad sector research and destination level diagnostic application.

At the same time, respondents should recognize that the Futures Study is not intended to serve solely as a tool redevelopment project. The final report and related deliverables must stand on their own as a comprehensive sector research product, while also offering practical insights that can support the future direction of a DI Assessment Tool where appropriate.

SCOPE OF WORK

PROJECT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The selected partner will facilitate an initial project kickoff with Destinations International staff to confirm the project goals, methodology, timeline, roles, responsibilities, deliverables, communication process, review schedule, and decision points.

The selected partner will be expected to provide ongoing project management, including regular check ins, written status updates, timeline management, meeting facilitation, and documentation of major decisions.

REVIEW OF PRIOR FUTURES STUDY EDITIONS

The selected partner will be expected to review prior Futures Study editions and related materials to understand the study's history, methodology, structure, findings, frameworks, and application across the sector.

This review should include consideration of the prior survey process administered by MMGY NextFactor and the degree to which the 2027 methodology should maintain continuity, improve comparability, refine survey design, or introduce new approaches that better reflect the current and future needs of destination organizations.

Respondents should describe how they would build upon, refine, or improve the approach used in prior Futures Study editions while ensuring credibility, continuity, and appropriate comparability where useful.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND SECTOR SCAN

The selected partner will conduct a comprehensive review of relevant research, reports, data, policy developments, economic conditions, social trends, technological changes, and sector specific insights affecting destination organizations and the visitor economy.

This review should include both tourism specific sources and adjacent sectors that influence the future of destination organizations, such as economic development, community development, public policy, transportation, workforce, housing, technology, artificial intelligence, sustainability, placemaking, meetings and events, resident sentiment, and public funding.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The selected partner will design and conduct qualitative research with destination organization leaders, industry partners, civic leaders, community stakeholders, and other relevant voices across the tourism landscape.

The proposal should describe the recommended number and type of interviews, focus groups, roundtables, or facilitated discussions. Respondents should also explain how they would ensure broad representation across geography, organization size, budget, market type, sector role, and professional perspective.

ADVISORY GROUP ENGAGEMENT

The selected partner may be asked to support the formation, facilitation, and management of one or more advisory groups to guide the study. This may include a global advisory group, regional advisory participants, subject matter experts, or specialized panels focused on specific themes.

The selected partner should describe how advisory input would be gathered, synthesized, and incorporated into the final analysis.

SURVEY DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

The selected partner will design and administer a large-scale global survey of destination organization professionals and relevant sector stakeholders. The survey should capture quantitative insights related to major trends, strategic priorities, organizational roles, threats, opportunities, evolving mandates, community vitality, and measures of success.

Respondents should propose an approach to survey development, testing, distribution, promotion, response quality, data analysis, and reporting. The survey should be designed to allow meaningful comparison across organization types, geographies, budget sizes, and other relevant segments where sample sizes allow.

The selected partner should also describe how the 2027 survey will account for prior Futures Study survey structures, including approaches previously administered by MMGY NextFactor, while improving or refreshing the methodology where appropriate.

ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC INTERPRETATION

The selected partner will analyze the qualitative and quantitative research findings and translate them into clear, useful, and actionable insights for destination organization leaders.

The analysis may include a SWOT style assessment or comparable strategic framework that identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the sector. Respondents may also propose other models or frameworks that would help destination organizations understand their future operating environment and decision-making priorities.

The final analysis should be practical and sector specific. It should not only identify what is changing but also explain why it matters and how destination organizations should respond.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH, INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDED ENHANCEMENTS

In addition to the core scope described in this RFP, respondents are encouraged to propose additional research, insights, methodologies, frameworks, or deliverables that they believe would strengthen the 2027 Destinations International Futures Study.

Examples may include, but are not limited to, enhanced segmentation analysis, regional comparisons, executive interviews, scenario planning, benchmarking, predictive insights, data visualization, stakeholder toolkits, implementation guides, issue specific briefs, leadership discussion guides, or additional presentation formats.

Respondents should clearly distinguish between the core proposed scope and any optional or enhanced elements, including associated costs, timing implications, data requirements, and expected value to Destinations International and its members.

FINAL REPORT DEVELOPMENT

The selected partner will develop a professionally written report. Destinations International will lead the design and branding efforts for this study. Both parties will work together to ensure the report is accessible, visually compelling, practical, and suitable for use by destination organization executives, boards, elected officials, industry partners, and other stakeholders.

All materials must be developed in alignment with Destinations International branding, editorial standards, accessibility expectations, and communications strategy.

PRESENTATION AND LAUNCH MATERIALS

The selected partner will develop copy for a presentation deck and related launch materials that Destinations International can use at conferences, webinars, board meetings, member briefings, and industry events.

The copy for the presentation materials should be designed so that Destinations International staff can use them independently following the completion of the project.

The final report, translated versions of agreed upon materials, presentation deck, and launch ready deliverables must be completed in advance of Destinations International's 2027 Annual Convention, which will take place in July 2027.

TRANSLATION AND GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY

Destinations International will take the lead with translation services. Respondents should identify recommended translation needs for the survey instrument, participant communications, global participation, distribution, executive summary, final report, presentation materials, and member engagement,

All final translated materials must be completed in advance of Destinations International's July 2027 Annual Convention. Respondents should include translation assumptions and estimated costs (Destinations International will assume these costs), quality control process, timeline requirements, and recommended languages as part of their proposal. Final translation needs will be confirmed in partnership with Destinations International.

ANTICIPATED DELIVERABLES

The final scope will be determined in partnership with the selected vendor. However, anticipated deliverables throughout the project lifecycle may include:

- A detailed project work plan and timeline.
- A research methodology memo.
- A review summary of prior Futures Study editions and recommended methodological considerations for 2027.
- A literature review and sector scan summary.
- Stakeholder interview and advisory group protocols.
- A global survey instrument.
- Survey administration and response summary.
- Cleaned and analyzed data files, where appropriate.
- A summary of key findings.
- A strategic framework, SWOT style analysis, or comparable future focused model.
- A full final report, provided as publication-ready copy and support content for Destinations International to incorporate into branded reports and materials.

- Content and copy for derivative resources, as appropriate (e.g., issue briefs, regional summaries, discussion guides, implementation tools, infographics and quarterly insights), with Destinations International responsible for sourcing creative development, branding, translation and final production.

BRANDING, OWNERSHIP AND USE OF MATERIALS

The 2027 Futures Study will be produced as a Destinations International research initiative and must be developed in full alignment with Destinations International branding.

All public facing materials, research instruments, reports, presentations, graphics, data visualizations, summaries, and related assets must be reviewed and approved by Destinations International prior to release.

Respondents should clearly describe their assumptions related to intellectual property, data ownership, report ownership, use of findings, public presentation rights, and reuse of materials. Destinations International expects to retain ownership or appropriate usage rights for the final study, underlying research outputs, and all branded deliverables developed through this project.

The Destinations International Foundation must be appropriately recognized as the supporting entity for the project in accordance with guidance provided by Destinations International.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS

Destinations International is seeking a partner or project team with demonstrated experience in several of the following areas:

- Large scale sector research.
- Tourism, destination organization, DMO, CVB, or visitor economy research.
- Global survey design and analysis.
- Qualitative interviews, focus groups, and stakeholder engagement.
- Strategic planning or future focused research.
- SWOT analysis or comparable strategic frameworks.
- Executive level report writing.
- Data visualization and research storytelling.

- Experience working with trade associations, foundations, nonprofits, public agencies, or member-based organizations.
- Understanding of destination organizations, tourism boards, public funding, community engagement, resident sentiment, destination stewardship, community vitality, and the evolving role of destination organizations.
- Ability to produce polished, fully branded, public facing research products.
- Ability to manage translations and global accessibility needs.
- Ability to bring additional research expertise, innovative methodologies, field tested best practices, and practical insights that enhance the value, usability, and long-term relevance of the study.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Proposals should include the following:

- A brief overview of the firm or project team.
- A statement of understanding of the project and its importance to Destinations International and the destination sector.
- A proposed methodology and work plan.
- A description of how the proposed methodology would build upon, refine, or improve the approach used in prior Futures Study editions, including the prior survey process administered by MMGY NextFactor, while ensuring continuity, credibility, and comparability where appropriate.
- A description of how the Community Vitality Wheel would be incorporated into the research and final deliverables.
- A proposed approach to stakeholder interviews, advisory engagement, and survey design.
- A description of any additional research, insights, methodologies, best practices, frameworks, tools, or deliverables the respondent recommends bringing to the project, including the rationale, expected value, timeline implications, and any associated costs.
- A description of how the respondent would approach the relationship between the 2027 Futures Study and the DestinationNEXT Assessment Tool / revised DI Assessment Tool, including how the study's findings could inform the tool's redevelopment while preserving the distinct purpose, methodology, and autonomy of each initiative.
- A proposed list of deliverables.
- A project timeline with major milestones, including completion of the final report, translated materials, copy for the presentation deck, and launch ready deliverables prior to the July 2027 Annual Convention.
- A project team structure, including roles and bios of key personnel.
- Relevant experience and examples of comparable work.
- A detailed budget, including professional fees, travel assumptions, technology or survey platform costs, and any optional add ons.
- References from comparable clients or projects.
- Any assumptions, dependencies, or exclusions.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

PROPOSALS WILL BE EVALUATED BASED ON THE FOLLOWING

- Demonstrated understanding of Destinations International, destination organizations, and the visitor economy.
- Strength, clarity, and feasibility of the proposed methodology.
- Ability to conduct credible qualitative and quantitative research at a global scale.
- Ability to translate findings into actionable strategy for destination organization leaders.
- Experience with future focused research, sector analysis, and executive level reporting.
- Ability to respect the legacy and methodological value of prior Futures Study editions while proposing a refreshed, competitive, and fully Destinations International branded approach for the 2027 study.
- Ability to incorporate the Community Vitality Wheel as a meaningful project framework.
- Ability to understand and articulate the relationship between broad sector research and destination level diagnostic tools, including how the 2027 Futures Study may inform the redevelopment of the DestinationNEXT Assessment Tool without becoming solely defined by that purpose.
- Ability to bring additional research expertise, innovative methodologies, field tested best practices, and practical insights that enhance the value, usability, and long term relevance of the 2027 Futures Study.
- Quality of proposed deliverables and storytelling approach.
- Experience with branding, design, accessibility, and public facing research products.
- Project team qualifications and relevant experience.
- Budget alignment and overall value.
- Ability to meet the project timeline, including final production needs in advance of the 2027 Annual Convention.
- Ability to work collaboratively with Destinations International staff and designated stakeholders.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted electronically by **September 18th, 2026**:

Andreas Weissenborn

SVP; Advocacy & Destination Advancement

Destinations International

aweissenborn@destinationsinternational.org

Proposals should be submitted as a PDF attachment. Supplemental materials, work samples, or appendices may be included as separate attachments or links. Respondents are encouraged to keep proposals clear, concise, and organized around the requirements outlined in this RFP.

Late submissions may not be considered. Destinations International reserves the right to request clarification, additional information, or revised materials from any respondent during the review process.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT TIMELINE

The final project timeline will be confirmed with the selected partner. Respondents should propose a detailed timeline that allows for completion of all final deliverables in advance of Destinations International's 2027 Annual Convention, which will take place in July 2027.

Project Phase | Anticipated Timing | Key Activities and Deliverables

Phase 1: Project Kickoff and Work Plan | Confirm scope, goals, methodology, project governance, roles, communication process, timeline, review schedule, and decision points.

Phase 2: Review of Prior Studies and Sector Scan | Review prior Futures Study editions, prior survey methodology, related DI materials, sector research, adjacent industry trends, and relevant external data.

Phase 3: Research Design and Advisory Engagement | Finalize research questions, advisory structure, stakeholder engagement plan, interview protocols, survey framework, and Community Vitality Wheel integration.

Phase 4: Qualitative Research | Conduct interviews, focus groups, roundtables, advisory sessions, or other stakeholder engagement activities.

Phase 5: Survey Development, Testing, and Translation | Draft, review, test, revise, and translate the survey instrument and related participant communications as needed.

Phase 6: Survey Administration and Promotion | Launch and manage the global survey, monitor response rates, support outreach, and ensure quality control.

Phase 7: Data Analysis and Strategic Interpretation | Analyze quantitative and qualitative findings, identify major trends, opportunities, threats, strategies, implications, and future focused frameworks.

Phase 8: Draft Findings and Internal Review | Present preliminary findings to Destinations International, gather feedback, and confirm direction for the final report and related deliverables.

Phase 9: Report Writing, Design, and Revisions | Develop draft report, executive summary, data visualizations, graphics, and supporting materials in Destinations International branding.

Phase 10: Translation, Accessibility Review, and Final Production | Complete final report, agreed upon translations, accessibility review, final design, quality control, and production ready files.

Phase 11: Presentation and Launch Preparation | Develop presentation deck, talking points, launch materials, communications support, and any convention related materials.

Phase 12: Annual Convention Release and Activation | July 2027 | Support release, presentation, or activation of the 2027 Destinations International Futures Study in conjunction with the 2027 Annual Convention.

BUDGET

The target project budget is **\$170,000 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.

Respondents should provide a detailed budget that clearly separates professional fees, technology or survey platform costs, travel costs, and optional deliverables.

Respondents may also include tiered options that distinguish between a core project scope and enhanced deliverables, such as copy for regional briefs, issue specific industry briefs, additional presentations, stakeholder toolkits, implementation guides, or expanded translation support.

Budget submissions should include:

- Total proposed project cost.
- Professional fees by phase or major task.
- Estimated survey platform, data processing, or technology costs.
- Estimated travel costs, if applicable.
- Optional or enhanced scope items, priced separately.
- Any assumptions that may affect cost.

SELECTION PROCESS

Destinations International will review proposals based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this RFP. Destinations International may choose to conduct interviews with selected respondents before making a final decision.

The selection process may include:

- Initial review for completeness and alignment with the RFP requirements.
- Evaluation by Destinations International staff and designated reviewers.
- Follow up questions or clarification requests, if needed.
- Finalist interviews, if needed.
- Reference checks, if needed.
- Vendor selection and contract negotiation.

Destinations International is not obligated to select the lowest cost proposal. The final selection will be based on the proposal that best meets the needs of Destinations International, the Destinations International Foundation, and the destination sector.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Destinations International reserves the right to accept, reject, or modify any proposal, to request clarification or additional information, to negotiate with one or more respondents, and to select the proposal that best meets the needs of the organization and the destination sector.

Issuance of this RFP does not obligate Destinations International to award a contract or pay any costs incurred in preparing a proposal. All costs associated with proposal preparation and submission are the responsibility of the respondent.

Destinations International may modify the scope, timeline, deliverables, or process described in this RFP as needed. Any major changes to the RFP process may be communicated to known respondents.

All proposals and related materials submitted in response to this RFP may be treated as confidential by Destinations International to the extent practical and appropriate, but respondents should clearly identify any proprietary or confidential information included in their submission.

ATTACHMENTS AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Respondents may be provided with background materials to inform their proposals, which may include prior Futures Study reports, prior proposal materials, Destinations International brand guidance, the Community Vitality Wheel, and other relevant research or strategic materials.

Relevant reference materials may include:

- Prior Futures Study reports and related materials.
- Prior DestinationNEXT proposals or scopes of work.
- Destinations International Community Vitality Wheel.
- Destinations International brand standards or design guidance.
- Relevant Destinations International research, advocacy, or Foundation materials.
- Additional materials may be provided at Destinations International's discretion.

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION

RFP SCHEDULE

RFP Milestone | Anticipated Date

RFP Issued | Week of July 27th, 2026

Deadline for Questions from Respondents | August 14th, 2026

Responses to Questions Distributed | By or before August 21st, 2026

Proposal Submission Deadline | September 18th, 2026

Vendor Selection | Week of September 28th, 2026

Anticipated Project Kickoff | Week of October 5th, 2026

Destinations International reserves the right to adjust this schedule as needed.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RFP

All questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing by August 14, 2026 to:

Andreas Weissenborn

SVP; Advocacy & Destination Advancement

Destinations International

aweissenborn@destinationsinternational.org

Questions submitted after the deadline may not be answered. Destinations International may, at its discretion, share responses to submitted questions with all known respondents to ensure a fair and consistent process.

Respondents should not contact other Destinations International staff, board members, Foundation representatives, committee members, or related stakeholders regarding this RFP unless directed to do so by the primary RFP contact.



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