

DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

2027 DMAP GLOBAL EXPANSION RESEARCH AND MARKET ASSESSMENT

DUE DATE: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2026

BACKGROUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the support of the Destinations International Foundation, Destinations International (DI) is seeking proposals from qualified research and consulting firms to conduct an independent assessment of opportunities to expand the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP).

DMAP is Destinations International's (DI) premier organizational accreditation program, with an established presence across the United States and Canada. However, participation remains limited in international markets, with varying levels of adoption among destination organizations of different sizes, budgets, and market characteristics, including within North America. This presents an opportunity to examine how DI can further strengthen awareness and recognition of DMAP, expand understanding of its value, and identify ways destination organizations across all markets can more effectively leverage the accreditation program.

Before committing resources to expansion, DI requires a rigorous, data backed and evidence-based understanding of the opportunity. The selected firm will assess DMAP's current position and brand recognition, participation patterns across organization and market sizes, priority international markets, the standards equivalencies needed in different markets, how DMAP compares with accreditation programs offered by trade associations in other industries, and the adaptations needed for DMAP to remain relevant and credible worldwide.

The findings will guide DI's decisions on future investment, program design and market expansion. The research should not presuppose a specific expansion model. Its purpose is to identify where opportunities exist, what barriers must be addressed and how DMAP can scale responsibly while protecting the rigor and integrity of the accreditation.

CONTACT & RESPONSE

Emily Scheiderer
Vice President of Professional Development
Destinations International
Email: escheiderer@destinationsinternational.org

RFP DUE DATE: Dec 16, 2026

RELEVANT INFORMATION

ABOUT DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

Destinations International is the global trade 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. DI advances this work through four core pillars: Community, Destination Tools, Professional Development and Advocacy and Research.
This research is made possible with support from the Destinations International Foundation, which invests in innovation, research and talent development within the destination sector.

ABOUT DMAP

The Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) is the highest organizational accreditation offered by Destinations International. It provides third-party validation that a destination organization meets a defined set of industry standards across governance, finance, human resources, stakeholder relations, sales and marketing, research and other standard areas.
Accreditation provides destination organizations with a credible way to demonstrate accountability, organizational strength, and a commitment to operational excellence to government leaders, boards, funding partners, customers, and community stakeholders. Beyond validating adherence to established industry standards, DMAP encourages a culture of continuous improvement, challenging organizations to strengthen their practices, elevate performance, and advance operational excellence year over year.
The value of accreditation depends not only on the standards it upholds, but also on how well DMAP is recognized, understood, and leveraged by both the organizations pursuing accreditation and the audiences they seek to influence. Understanding and further developing DMAP's brand, awareness, and global value proposition is therefore central to this research.

BACKGROUND AND STRATEGIC RATIONALE

This research includes but is not limited to international expansion. Participation in DMAP outside the United States and Canada remains limited, but participation also varies across organization and market sizes within existing markets. Adoption does not consistently follow staff capacity or financial resources, which suggests that motivation, perceived value and organizational priorities play as significant a role as cost or capacity. Understanding what drives or deters participation across organizations of every size, budget and market type is essential to strengthening DMAP's value proposition and designing pathways and support structures that broaden participation without compromising rigor.

DI has already taken early steps toward global participation through the DMAP Global and small destination Scholarships, which covers initial application fees for a select cohort of international destination organizations. This cohort's experience should inform the research.

This work aligns with DI's priorities in globalization, industry standards and organizational excellence. It will ensure future decisions about where and how DMAP grows are grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

PURPOSE AND STRATEGIC INTENT

The purpose of this research is to determine how DMAP can strengthen its position as the destination industry's recognized accreditation and responsibly expand its reach across global markets and organizations of varying sizes.

The study should answer questions such as:

- What is DMAP's current market position, and where are the greatest opportunities for growth?
- How well is the DMAP brand recognized and understood by destination organizations and their stakeholders, and how is its value perceived in different markets?
- How can DMAP's brand, awareness and global value proposition be strengthened?
- Which international markets and audience segments should be prioritized, and why?
- What regulatory, governance, cultural and structural differences affect how DMAP applies in different markets, and what standards equivalencies would be required?
- How does DMAP compare with accreditation programs offered by trade associations in other industries, in structure, rigor, value and recognition?
- What drives or deters participation, and why does adoption differ across organization and market sizes?
- What adaptations to the program or standards are needed for global relevance without reducing rigor?
- What resources, infrastructure, partnerships and investment would a phased expansion require?

SCOPE OF WORK

PROJECT SCOPE & DESCRIPTION

DI seeks a qualified external research and consulting firm to conduct a comprehensive, independent assessment of DMAP expansion opportunities. The selected firm will conduct all research and related work, including research design, participant recruitment and outreach, surveys, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, benchmarking, analysis and reporting.

Roles and Responsibilities

The selected firm will be fully responsible for executing the research. DI's role will be limited to:

- Providing DMAP program information, standards, and participation data
- Facilitating introductions to select segments within DI's membership, such as DMAP-accredited organizations and DMAP Scholarship participants
- Reviewing and approving the work plan, research instruments, and deliverables
- Participating as a non-contributing observer in select focus group discussions to gain firsthand insight into participant perspectives, without influencing or directing the conversations
- Providing feedback at scheduled check-ins and key milestones

Beyond these select member introductions, the selected firm is responsible for identifying, recruiting and convening all research participants, including assembling focus groups and securing survey samples.
DI will not serve as a recruitment or administrative resource. Respondents should come prepared with the networks and capabilities to reach the broader market independently; proposals that depend on DI to source participants or organize feedback groups will not be considered competitive.

DI Oversight and Review

DI reserves the right to:

- Observe or listen in on focus groups, interviews, and other research sessions, with appropriate notice to participants
- Review and approve all research instruments, including survey questionnaires, interview guides, and discussion guides, before fielding
- Review research in progress, including survey response rates, sample composition, and interim findings
- Request adjustments to the research approach where needed to meet project objectives
- Exercise final review and approval authority over all research deliverables, findings, reports, and any materials intended for external distribution or public use

Respondents should describe how they will accommodate DI observation of research sessions while protecting participant candor and confidentiality.

PROJECT SCOPE & DESCRIPTION

Research Reach and Methodology

To produce a complete and objective view of the market, the selected firm must be able to reach beyond DI's membership. This includes non-member destination organizations, organizations in markets where DI has limited presence and the stakeholders accreditation is meant to influence. Respondents should describe the networks, panels, partnerships or other channels they will use to achieve this reach.

The project should combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Respondents are encouraged to propose the methodologies they believe will produce the most credible findings, which may include market analysis, stakeholder interviews, surveys, focus groups, benchmarking and document review.

Findings should reflect the diversity of destination organizations across geography, size, budget, funding model and governance structure.

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY

1. Assess DMAP's Current Market Position

Establish a baseline of DMAP's current reach and adoption, including:

- Participation by region, organization size and organization type
- Retention, renewal and reasons organizations pursue, delay or discontinue accreditation
- DMAP's competitive and industry positioning

2. Evaluate DMAP Brand, Awareness and Global Value

As DI's highest organizational accreditation, DMAP's value depends on how well it is recognized and understood. Assess the current state of the DMAP brand and how its awareness and global value can be further developed, including:

- Brand recognition and understanding among destination organizations, by region and organization size
- Awareness of DMAP among the audiences accreditation is meant to influence, including government leaders, boards and funding partners
- How the value of accreditation is perceived in different cultural and market contexts
- Gaps between DMAP's intended positioning and current perception
- Opportunities to strengthen the DMAP brand, value proposition and messaging for global audiences

3. Identify and Prioritize International Markets

Evaluate where DMAP has the greatest growth potential outside North America, including:

- Market demand and readiness for accreditation
- Size and structure of the destination organization landscape
- Existing DI membership, partnerships and networks
- Criteria for prioritizing markets and audience segments

SUGGESTED AREAS OF INQUIRY

4. Examine Regulatory, Governance and Standards Equivalency

Destination organizations operate under widely varying legal, governmental and cultural structures, and some DMAP standards may not apply as written in every market. For each priority market, examine:

- Regulatory, legal and governance models for destination organizations
- Existing national or regional requirements, certifications or audits that may overlap with DMAP standards
- Which DMAP standards apply as written, which require a market-specific equivalent and which may not apply
- Proposed standards equivalents, including the documentation or evidence that would satisfy each standard in that market
- Language, translation and local review capacity

5. Benchmark Against Trade Association Accreditation Programs

Compare DMAP with organizational accreditation programs offered by trade associations across industries. Benchmarks need not be all tourism-focused; the most relevant comparisons may come from industries and sectors with established accreditation, certification, and operational excellence frameworks, including healthcare, oil and gas, financial services and banking, skilled trades, food safety, education, government, chambers of commerce, professional associations, and other industry-related organizations. Areas of comparison may include:

- Program structure, standards, review process and renewal requirements
- Rigor, credibility and recognition among the stakeholders each program is meant to influence
- Participation rates, pricing and support models across organizations of different sizes
- How programs have expanded internationally and managed standards across markets
- Brand positioning and how programs communicate the value of accreditation
- Practices DMAP could adopt or avoid

6. Understand Perceived Value and Barriers to Participation

Explore how organizations perceive the value of accreditation and what prevents participation, distinguishing between:

- Practical barriers such as cost, staff capacity, time, documentation and language
- Perceptual barriers such as relevance, unfamiliarity or the sense that the standards were designed for a different market

7. Analyze Participation Across Organization and Market Sizes

Examine how and why participation differs among organizations of varying size, budget and market type, in both existing and new markets, including:

- Participation patterns by organization budget, staff size and market size
- Motivations for pursuing accreditation and reasons for not pursuing it, by segment
- How perceived value, organizational priorities and capacity each influence the decision
- What each segment needs from DMAP to see accreditation as worthwhile
- Potential pathways, tiered models or support structures that broaden participation without compromising rigor

8. Identify Program and Standards Adaptations

Based on the findings, identify adaptations to the DMAP standards, accreditation process or program model needed for global relevance and credibility while protecting the integrity of the accreditation.

9. Develop a Phased Expansion Roadmap

Deliver a data-informed, phased roadmap for potential expansion that identifies the resource, infrastructure, partnership, financial and operational requirements, along with recommended sequencing and success measures.

PROJECT PLANNING

PROJECT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The selected firm will lead a project kickoff with DI staff to confirm goals, methodology, timeline, roles, deliverables, review schedule and decision points. Throughout the engagement, the firm will provide monthly check-ins with DI staff, written status updates and documentation of major decisions, along with interim findings at key milestones.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DMAP MATERIALS

The selected firm will review DMAP standards, program materials and participation data. Limited formal research on DMAP exists to date, so respondents should plan for this project to establish the foundational body of research on the program's market position, perception and growth potential.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The selected firm will conduct qualitative research with a representative range of stakeholders, which may include:

- DMAP-accredited destination organizations
- Non-accredited and prospective organizations, including smaller organizations
- Non-member destination organizations, in North America and internationally
- Organizations in potential expansion markets, including those with no current DI relationship
- DMAP Board members, reviewers or volunteers
- Regional associations, national tourism bodies and other potential partners
- Government leaders, board members and funding partners who rely on, or could rely on, accreditation as a measure of destination organizational excellence

Proposals should recommend the number and type of interviews, focus groups or roundtables and explain how the firm will independently recruit and convene participants and achieve broad representation beyond DI's membership. Proposals should distinguish between participants the firm will source directly and the select member segments DI will introduce.

SURVEY DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

The selected firm will design and administer a survey measuring awareness, perceived value, barriers and readiness for accreditation. The selected firm will be responsible for survey distribution and for securing a sample that extends beyond DI's membership. Proposals should outline the approach to survey development, testing, translation, sampling, distribution, response quality and analysis. Results should allow comparison across regions, organization sizes and other segments where sample sizes permit.

ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC INTERPRETATION

The selected firm will translate findings into clear, actionable recommendations that explain not only where opportunities and barriers exist, but why they matter and how DI should respond.

PROJECT PLANNING

OPTIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

Respondents may propose additional research or deliverables that would strengthen the study, such as market-entry scenarios, financial modeling, partnership mapping or pilot program recommendations. Optional elements should be clearly separated from the core scope, with associated costs, timing and expected value.

TRANSLATION AND GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY

Respondents should identify recommended translation needs and languages for survey instruments, participant communications and key deliverables.

DELIVERABLES

Final scope will be confirmed with the selected firm. Anticipated deliverables include:

- Project work plan, timeline and research methodology document
- Interview, focus group and survey instruments
- Comprehensive research findings report
- Assessment of DMAP brand awareness and perceived value, with recommendations to strengthen its brand, value proposition and global positioning
- Identification and prioritization of potential markets and audience segments
- Comparative benchmarking of DMAP against trade association accreditation programs across industries
- Analysis of participation drivers and barriers across organization and market sizes
- Standards equivalency analysis for priority markets, including proposed market-specific equivalents
- Tiered structure for DMAP standard entry points and readiness
- Recommended program or standards adaptations
- Phased expansion roadmap, including resource, partnership, financial and operational considerations
- Executive summary for DI leadership and board audiences
- Presentation of findings
- Cleaned and analyzed data files, where appropriate
- All source files in editable formats, including Word and PowerPoint

INTENDED USE OF RESEARCH

The findings will inform DI's strategic planning and budgeting for future phases of DMAP expansion.

For accredited and prospective organizations, broader recognition of DMAP strengthens the value of accreditation as a credible indicator of organizational excellence. For organizations in markets where DMAP has limited presence, the research will identify what is required to make accreditation accessible, relevant and credible. At an industry level, it will support a more globally representative understanding of excellence in destination marketing and management.

PROJECT PLANNING

RESEARCH OWNERSHIP, PUBLICATION RIGHTS, BRANDING, AND USE OF MATERIALS

This study is a Destinations International (DI) research initiative, supported by the Destinations International Foundation. All research conducted under this agreement, including collected data, research instruments, findings, analyses, reports, presentations, and associated deliverables, shall be the exclusive property of DI, subject to applicable law and any expressly agreed exceptions.

DI retains sole authority over the review, approval, publication, distribution, presentation, and public use of all research findings and associated materials. The selected firm shall not independently publish, distribute, present, reference, reproduce, or otherwise disclose any research findings, data, or project materials without DI's prior written authorization. All requests for such authorization must be submitted through DI's formally designated review and approval channels and are subject to DI's internal review processes. Communications with, or informal approvals from, individual DI staff members shall not constitute authorization. Only written approval issued through DI's designated approval process shall be considered valid and binding.

All commissioned research shall be branded and attributed to Destinations International, with appropriate recognition of the Destinations International Foundation as the supporting entity. DI retains exclusive authority over the public positioning, branding, attribution, and dissemination of the research. The selected firm may not use the research, its findings, deliverables, or its association with DI for promotional, marketing, portfolio, or other public-facing purposes without DI's prior written consent, obtained through the designated approval process outlined above.

Respondents must clearly disclose any proposed exceptions, limitations, or assumptions regarding intellectual property rights, data ownership, licensing, or reuse of materials within their proposals. Any such exceptions shall be subject to DI's review and written approval prior to execution of the agreement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The selected firm must protect sensitive data and anonymize participants unless explicit consent is provided. Proposals should describe how interview subjects, survey respondents and confidential program information will be protected.

PROPOSAL REQUEST

DI invites qualified research firms, consulting organizations and academic partners to submit proposals. Firms with experience in the association market, and particularly with accreditation programs offered by trade associations, will be highly considered. This includes experience evaluating, developing, benchmarking or expanding accreditation and certification programs that carry recognized credibility within their industries.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS

DI seeks a firm or project team with demonstrated experience in several of the following areas:

- Research and consulting for trade associations and member-based organizations
- Accreditation, certification or standards-based programs, particularly those offered by trade associations
- International market research and market-entry analysis
- Tourism, destination organization or visitor economy research
- Brand, awareness and value-proposition research
- Qualitative research and stakeholder engagement across cultures and languages
- Survey design and analysis
- Benchmarking and strategic roadmap development
- Established research networks, panels or partnerships that extend beyond DI's membership, including internationally
- Executive-level report writing

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Proposals should include:

- Overview of the firm and project team
- Statement of understanding of the project and its importance to DI and the destination sector
- Relevant experience with trade associations and accreditation programs
- Proposed methodology, research design and work plan
- Approach to market prioritization, brand and awareness assessment, stakeholder engagement and benchmarking
- Approach to participant recruitment and survey distribution, including how the firm will reach organizations and stakeholders beyond DI's membership
- Approach to analyzing participation across organization and market sizes
- Approach to developing standards equivalents for priority markets
- Proposed deliverables
- Project timeline, including delivery of the final research report by July 1, 2027
- Team structure, roles and bios of key personnel
- Examples of comparable work and any client references or testimonials
- Detailed budget, including professional fees, travel, technology costs and optional items
- Confidentiality assurance
- Assumptions, dependencies or exclusions

PROPOSAL REQUEST

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Experience with trade associations and association-based accreditation programs
- Understanding of DI, DMAP and destination organizations
- Strength, clarity and feasibility of the proposed methodology
- Ability to conduct credible research across international markets
- Reach beyond DI's membership and ability to independently execute research, recruitment and outreach
- Ability to translate findings into a practical, phased roadmap
- Approach to protecting the rigor and integrity of the accreditation
- Quality and relevance of proposed deliverables
- Team qualifications
- Budget and overall value
- Ability to meet the project timeline and collaborate effectively with DI staff

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted electronically as a PDF by December 16, 2026 to:

Emily Scheiderer
Vice President of Professional Development
Destinations International
escheiderer@destinationsinternational.org

Supplemental materials, work samples or appendices may be included as separate attachments or links. Proposals should be concise and organized around the requirements of this RFP. Late submissions will not be considered.

All submitted proposals will receive an email confirmation acknowledging receipt. If confirmation is not received within two (2) business days of submission, respondents are encouraged to follow up via email to ensure their proposal has been successfully received.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT TIMELINE

The selected firm will be contracted in January 2027 and will conduct the research over approximately five months. The final research report will be expected to be submitted to DI by July 1, 2027, to inform DI's strategic planning and budgeting. DI expects monthly check-ins and interim updates throughout the engagement.

Implementation support beyond July 1, 2027, is not included in the scope of this RFP. Should a respondent elect to propose such services, they may be included as an optional component of the submission, provided they are clearly distinguished from the core proposal, with a separate scope of work, deliverables, timeline, and itemized pricing. Any optional services will be evaluated independently and shall not be considered part of the required project scope.

PROPOSAL REQUEST

BUDGET

The anticipated project budget is $100,000–$140,000 USD. The final contract amount will depend on the proposed reach of the research and the firm's demonstrated ability to deliver the requested outcomes. Funds will be released upon execution of the research and consulting contract.

DI will consider proposals that offer a cost-effective approach aligned with project goals.

To uphold the integrity, independence, and transparency of the DMAP accreditation program, DI will not consider proposals that include in-kind contributions, bartered services, or other nonmonetary exchanges in lieu of payment for services. All proposed services must be supported by clearly defined monetary pricing and contractual terms. This requirement is intended to maintain appropriate separation between the accreditation program and external commercial arrangements, avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest, and ensure that the research and vendor selection processes remain objective, equitable, and consistent with sound accreditation governance practices.

Budgets should include:

- Total proposed cost
- Professional fees by phase or major task
- Survey platform, data processing or technology costs
- Travel or Translation costs, if applicable
- Optional scope items, priced separately
- Assumptions that may affect cost

SELECTION PROCESS

DI will review proposals against the evaluation criteria in this RFP. The process may include an initial completeness review, evaluation by DI staff and designated reviewers, clarification requests, finalist interviews, reference checks and contract negotiation.

DI is not obligated to select the lowest-cost proposal. Selection will be based on the proposal that best meets the needs of DI and the destination sector.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

DI reserves the right to accept, reject or modify any proposal, request additional information, negotiate with one or more respondents and adjust the scope, timeline or process described in this RFP.

Issuance of this RFP does not obligate DI to award a contract or pay any costs incurred in preparing a proposal. The final agreement will address duration, services, payment, confidentiality, data protection, intellectual property, termination and liability.

Proposals will be treated as confidential to the extent practical. Respondents should clearly identify any proprietary information.

PROPOSAL REQUEST

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Respondents may be provided with background materials, which may include:

- DMAP standards and program overview
- Summary DMAP participation data
- DMAP Scholarship program materials
- DI brand standards

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION

RFP SCHEDULE

RFP Issued | November 13, 2026
Deadline for Questions | November 20, 2026
Responses to Questions Distributed | November 24, 2026
Proposal Submission Deadline | December 16, 2026
Proposal Evaluation and Finalist Interviews | January 11-13, 2027
Vendor Selection and Contract Execution | January 2027
Project Kickoff | Late January–early February 2027
Monthly Check-ins and Interim Updates | February–June 2027
Final Research Report Due to DI | July 5, 2027

DI reserves the right to adjust this schedule as needed.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RFP

Questions must be submitted in writing by November 20, 2026 to:

Emily Scheiderer
Vice President of Professional Development
Destinations International
escheiderer@destinationsinternational.org

DI may share responses with all known respondents to ensure a fair process. Respondents should not contact other

DI staff, board members, committee members or Foundation representatives regarding this RFP unless directed by the primary contact.



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