

Frequently Asked Questions

Request for Proposals – International Marketing Services

1. When the RFP states language such as “International visitors stay an average of X days in California and spent an average of \$X” – does this amount include international transport and accommodation, or just spend money over and above their holiday costs?
 - A. This amount includes monies spent while in California in the following categories:
 - Accommodations
 - Air transportation within California
 - Ground Transportation within California
 - Food & Beverage
 - Entertainment
 - Gifts and Souvenirs
 - Other expenses spent in State not included above
2. For financial statements, do you want full or abbreviated accounts?
 - A. Please provide full accounts over the most recent 12-month period.
3. Are internal travel expenses part of an overall Admin and Overhead budget?
 - A. Yes, in-country travel expenses should be included in the Admin and Overhead budget.
4. Is the cost of distributing brochures (digital and print) part of the budget?
 - A. No, the cost attributed to fulfillment to consumers will be allocated to a global budget; trade fulfillment is allocated to the office travel trade budget.
5. Is there a predetermined and therefore expected % split of the key services i.e. Consumer vs. Trade and PR activities?
 - A. Please submit your recommendation as to the % split of key services as it relates to the marketing plan that you will be proposing.
6. Preferred format for RFP submission (word/ppt/PDF).
 - A. Each bidder is required to deliver hard copies in addition to an electronic version of their proposal. Electronic versions of the proposal must be in PDF format and sent to RFP Submissions at rfps@visitcalifornia.com. Hard copies must be sent by courier such as FedEx or UPS.

7. Do you have any customer research data that you can share with us?
 - A. Any publically available research will be on line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy/GlobalMarkets>
8. Can you provide information on recent creative/advertising campaigns?
 - A. Please refer to our Strategic Marketing Plan on our b2b site
(<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy/Strategic-Marketing-Plan/>)
for our media buy graph.
9. Do you have a marketing calendar or promotions, events, media buys, etc.?
 - A. Please refer to our Strategic Marketing Plan on our b2b site
(<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy/Strategic-Marketing-Plan/>)
10. Can we get access to RFP country audience insights and research?
 - A. Any publically available research is available on our b2b website -
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>
11. Is there access to any celebrity ambassadors?
 - A. A sample of celebrities we work with, availability and programming vary per individual and region, can be found on our consumer site, here:
<http://www.visitcalifornia.com/feature/dream365-landing-page-1>
12. Do you want to increase visitor numbers by a certain percentage and/or increase the spend of those visitors - what's the quantitative goals of this campaign?
 - A. In your proposal, your agency should suggest what program goals it would be able to achieve based on the scope for funding allotted.
13. Do you have more information on the Visit California pillars?
 - A. All marketing strategy information can be found on line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy>
14. What would a hero piece of coverage be for you?
 - A. We welcome your opinion on what you might deem appropriate.
15. What have you done previously that you felt was particularly successful and why?
 - A. We welcome your evaluation and give us your opinion of what you believe was a successful program.
16. Who do you admire in the travel and tourism space?

- A. We admire a whole host of travel destinations and destination marketers.
17. What do you believe to be your key issues for tourist considerations?
- A. We welcome you to propose your thoughts.
18. Who is the incumbent agency and why are you looking for a new partner?
- A. Visit California is required under statute to go out to RFP every five years for vendors in each international markets. Any information regarding Visit California agencies of record can be found on line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>
19. Would it be possible to organize a 'tissue session' before the final submission date, to discuss the plans we are proposing?
- A. Our RFP policy and timeframe is such that we cannot accommodate this request. However, if your firm is selected as a finalist for an oral interview, we will conduct a pre interview conference call with your organization prior to the oral interviews.
20. Will the presentations be in-person in California or locally in a designated city?
- A. International oral interviews are typically held in locally in market in designated cities per the RFPs. Visit California does reserve the right to change the proposed schedule at its discretion.
21. Who is the decision making / review panel for Visit California?
- A. The review panel will be made up of key Visit California marketing staff that have oversight of the RFP account, as well as an RFP facilitator and California travel industry representatives.
22. What platform is the e-marketing newsletter built on?
- A. Currently, it is a third party contractor, Zeta's and their proprietary platform, ZetaMail.
23. Will maintaining the e-marketing newsletter require any build or coding or is it templated?
- A. No building or coding required, just content support, translations/localization and review.
24. What social channels do you manage?

- A. Globally we are currently using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest. Expectation is for content support across platforms.
25. You reference driving engagement and acquisition. Are these the primary objectives for your social channels?
- A. All marketing strategy information can be found on-line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy>
26. Which channels are you key drivers of acquisition?
- A. All marketing strategy information can be found on line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy>
27. Do you have a partner in place for SEO and SEM? If so who, and can you provide an overview of your approach?
- A. SEM is managed by our global brand agency, MeringCarson, and SEO is managed by our content agency, Time California.
28. Does your paid media budget anticipate investments in Facebook, Twitter, and other social platforms? If so, do you have an amount in mind, or would paid social efforts need to come from the amount allocated to this contract?
- A. Paid social is funded from a different budget managed by our global brand agency.
29. What is your current content strategy?
- A. All marketing strategy information can be found on line at:
<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy>
30. How would you describe your tone of voice for social? Is it as effective as you would like?
- A. It is reflective of our brand.
31. Marketing Proposal - Competitive Analysis. What focus is supposed to be given here? Compare California to other main US destinations, or destinations worldwide? Or a different approach?
- A. Based on your research, we are interested in hearing who you think are Visit California's key competitors both globally and within the United States.
32. Is the requirement of years' experience mandatory and if that is the case, if we don't not meet this requirement - would we be eliminated?

- A. The company you represent must have the years' experience noted in the RFP. If you don't have that experience, you will not meet the minimum requirements.
33. Media campaigns – Visit California already works in partnership with a media purchasing agency. Does this mean that we will not have partnership/buy media from our local media agency?
- A. Visit California's global media agencies will handle the specific buy and creative aspect. Our global representation firm will assist and provide opportunities as needed on trade, public relations and cooperative programs.
34. If we are not a US based company, nor have any legal liaison to that market do we still need to provide a Form W8? If so how do we access such form, and instructions on how to be filled out?
- A. Yes, you are required to provide this form. The purpose of the form is to provide VCA written documentation that your company's personnel are not United States citizens, and are not conducting any business activities within the United States. Should you be awarded the contract, VCA will provide you the required form(s).
35. Is the Budget Form monthly or yearly? In the sample it seems that some of the figures are monthly and some are yearly.
- A. The budget form should be filled out with yearly numbers appropriated for each category.
36. In the Minimum Requirements what do you mean 'GAAP / IAS compliant financial statements'?
- A. At a minimum you should provide both an income statement and balance sheet. These are general financial statements utilized throughout the globe. Each line item on your financial statements should be based on reliable supporting documentation.
37. For RFP's where a video is required, if we aren't submitting a DVD of the video, how do we submit it as part of our submission? What format? Drop box, or You Tube?
- A. Video can be submitted on a USB drive or published on the internet (e.g. You Tube). If you provide a USB drive or CD, please deliver one item with each of your hard copy proposals. If you prefer to publish the video on the internet, please include the URL as part of your written proposal.

38. Can Concur be used as an expense control tool? Or will you require a different reporting system?
 - A. Currently Visit California uses Concur for travel and expense management for employees only. Vendors are required to submit invoices directly to Visit California.
39. Do day to day expenses such as sales calls, transportation and lunches with media and trade need to be included in the budget, or are they reimbursable?
 - A. These items need to be included and broken out within the respective budget categories.
40. Should Trade and PR fees be listed separately or combined within the budget?
 - A. Refer to the sample budget within each RFP and submit accordingly. Typically, Travel Trade and PR fees should be broken out separately in the proposed budget.
41. How comprehensive should the Marketing Strategy and Overview portion of the proposal be? We would like clarification on if specific creative concepts should be provided or if sharing strategic approach will suffice for the initial proposal. In addition to that, can you please provide insight as to the requested length of this portion of the RFP?
 - A. The written proposal criteria are included within the Scope of Work section. Each organization will be evaluated on proposed strategies, creativity and detail of plan. There are no parameters around information to be provided in terms of number of pages.
42. For the Scope of Work weighting, will it favor interpretation of the proposed scope of work or the resources and funding behind it?
 - A. We are interested in hearing your recommendations on presenting a scope of work that is reasonable, cost effective and appropriate.
43. Is it mandatory that we break down the budget based on the proposed scope of work as stated in the RFP or is it possible to submit a suggested budget based on our own interpretation of the Scope of Work?
 - A. You must break down the budget as outlined in the Budget Form within the RFP.
44. Will you accept a response that includes a partnership between the organization you have identified (and sent the RFP to) and another agency if together they meet the mandatory requirements? Please advise if additional information is required here.

- A. Yes, you can bid with another agency. If Financial Statements are required as part of the RFP, you will be required to submit Financial Statements for both companies.
45. What is California's largest international market?
- A. Mexico is the top international market with visitation to California, More information can be found at <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>.
46. What kind of research services or research vendors has Visit California directly, or indirectly (via partners), subscribed to?
- A. Current visitor and spending estimates are based on their historical reporting and growth in travel from other sources- US visitor numbers, air arrivals from Forward Keys, and cardholder counts from Visa Vue. Forward Keys is an aggregator of bookings made through GDS sources, and Visa Vue measures credit card usage and spending in California by country of origin. Visit California also conducted quantitative research in 2012 with Hall & Partners which looked at perceptions of the California brand and visitor planning behaviors. Other sources including SMARI, Dean Runyan & Associates, Tourism Economic and NTTO. More information can be found at <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>.
47. How does Visit California currently view its competitive set? Has that list changed or expanded over the years, or has it remained fairly static?
- A. Based on your research, we are interested in hearing who you think are Visit California's competitors both globally and in the US.
48. Beyond "Dream Big" and aspirational messaging, what are some attributes or other key messages that are important to Visit California?
- A. You can view Visit California's Dream Big Dividend Work Plan and the marketing plan at <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy/>
49. What kind of assets might the winning agency have access to?
- A. Visit California has an extensive asset management system with photography, videos, travel trade and media portals and asset management system. Visit California offices and industry partners can obtain access to these resources.
50. How have campaigns been measured in the past?
- A. Travel Trade programming has been evaluated by brochure analysis generated yearly by each Visit California appointed agency. Media is evaluated by activity in the marketplace broken down by source (press trip, events, advertising equivalency, etc.) or by specific campaign activity, this also takes account of social media led campaigns.
51. Regarding project process, is there an approach that Visit California prefers?

- A. All projects must adhere to Visit California guidelines and be approved prior to execution. All programs over a certain dollar amount require a project brief that is reviewed and approved by appropriate staff.
52. In terms of approvals, is an internal and/or external legal team typically involved?
- A. Project approvals are evaluated first by Visit California Country Director or discipline lead. Visit California has in house counsel, if additional information is needed.
53. How many agencies are involved in this process?
- A. As many companies that have submitted an intent-to-bid.
54. Are the line items under Scope of Work all required within the proposal?
- A. The scope of work listed is there to help present guidance to determine your total costs. We are interested in understanding your approach to each of the targeted segments.
55. What content management system (CMS) does the Visit California website use?
- A. Visit California utilizes a Drupal based system for our CMS system.
56. What existing email database management system and deployment tools does Visit California use?
- A. In-house we utilize Master DB to sync with Zeta (managed by our vendor)
57. The example budget form in the RFP outlines sample expenditures. Is this form intended to be used per activity or as an overall budget for a year summarized on one form?
- A. The budget form is intended for you to summarize your complete program budget per activity in one form.
58. Why are you conducting this RFP?
- A. It is Visit California's policy to go out to RFP every 5 years in markets exceeding budgets of \$200,000 or more.
59. Are there services that you require that you are currently not receiving from the incumbent firm and if so, what are they?
- A. The goal of issuing the RFP is to open up a bidding process to proposers in market in order to contract with the vendor that can best provide services to Visit California in the form of marketing representation based on the scope of work provided. Visit California asks all proposers to present their best marketing strategy based on that scope.
60. What criteria are important to you in selecting a firm? How would you rank the criteria?

- A. Refer to Proposal Evaluation Criteria in the RFP.
61. How much weight are you putting on the bidding firm's tourism experience over the last five years? How important is this in the decision making process?
- A. Refer to Proposal Evaluation Criteria in the RFP.
62. Are there any special circumstances or "hot buttons" of which we should be aware?
- A. None
63. What role will pricing play in your decision? What issues are of concern about pricing?
- A. Refer to Proposal Evaluation Criteria in the RFP
64. Who is responsible for managing the competition process? What role do they play in the Visit California corporate structure?
- A. Visit California's compliance officer does an initial evaluation of all written proposals. Those that have passed compliance are then sent onto an evaluation committee made up of Visit California management, an RFP facilitator and an industry representative.
65. The RFP mentions that we will support the consumer advertising and promotional campaign. Could you confirm if you will also need creative support in strategy and/or execution in this area?
- A. Visit California will depend on its in market representative to support key marketing initiatives that support the brand- the majority of those have been outlined in the scope of work pertaining to trade, coop and PR activities. Visit California has a global brand agency that develops creative.
66. Is there a demographic of the RFP market that you feel you have not reached adequately or to your satisfaction?
- A. You can find research information on our b2b website. We also welcome you to propose your thoughts. More information can be found at <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>.
67. Will Carat lead traditional and digital media buying across RFP or will you need local support in either of these areas?
- A. Yes, Carat is our global media buying agency and is managed by our global brand agency
68. The RFP mentions that the consumer-facing website serves as a hub for the digital ecosystem and is intended to drive content consumption and consumer action. As such, a key component for media and consumers, can you share any of your

website analytics to provide a better understanding of unique visitors to the site, current bounce rates, and engagement?

A. This information is found on our b2b website. More information can be found at <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com>.

69. Do you have specific goals for your website such as increase number of visitors by X%, increase opt-in newsletter numbers (trade and consumer), increase number of repeat visitors and/or length of stay on the site?

A. Currently our global sites are used for the specific country markets. We welcome your thoughts in this area.

70. Do you have any significant changes planned for the website as a whole during the time the winning proponent would be working on this campaign? For example, are you planning any new functionality, or opt-in/subscription-based content that you would want us to leverage?

A. Our Web site was redesigned and relaunched in late 2014 and we are continuing to add dynamic content and features.

71. Visit California projects increases in visitation in coming years. Are there other factors you can share that have influenced this projection beyond the current visitation increase rate?

A. These increases are based on our research projections provided by our research vendors. We assume factors such as increased airlift, proximity, ease of travel and lack of barriers play a role along with the vacation product experience.

72. Do you have specific KPI's and measureable goals for this campaign? Can you share the timeframe in which you expect to achieve them based on your current benchmarks?

A. We consider various factors by discipline. We have a detailed Scope of Work that will be developed with the winning agency that outlines key deliverables in terms of trade, PR and owned channel needs. This includes number of sales calls, press releases, media and trade fairs, media coverage ROI, product development and administration duties.

73. Can you share how you will measure success of this campaign?

A. Visit California utilizes several dynamic reporting tools to aggregate data across our markets. For example, the PReport for collection of media coverage and Brochure Analysis for collection of product from tour operator brochures.

74. What do you like about your current campaign and what would you like to see evolve?

- A. We welcome your evaluation and give us your opinion of what you believe was a successful program as part of our current campaign.
79. How will the effectiveness of the agency be measured within the initial one-year period?
- A. Annual reviews are done with each office to review administration, trade, PR and content deliverables.
80. What do you see as your biggest PR challenge in RFP designated country?
- A. We welcome you to propose your thoughts.
81. Could you provide some past examples of successful earned media opportunities in RFP designated country?
- A. For examples of partnerships that have been successful in the past, please review our annual report, Year in Review:
<http://yearinreview.visitcalifornia.com>
82. What type of earned media opportunities are you most interested in?
- A. We welcome your thoughts on what earned media opportunities we should be pursuing.
83. What are your priority markets in RFP designated country? Are there specific areas where you would like more exposure?
- A. We welcome your opinion on any areas you think California would benefit with more exposure.
84. Do you have any existing media partnerships or integrations?
- A. We are interested in hearing proposers' point of view on how they define successful partnerships. For examples of past strategic partnerships, please review our annual report, Year in Review:
<http://yearinreview.visitcalifornia.com>
85. What role do you want the Dream Big platform to play within your communications mix in RFP designated country?
- A. Dream Big is our brand identity and should be a fundamental part of the communications mix.
86. What is your social media value proposition to your followers / what do you hope fans will "get" from following your social properties? Information? Special event invitations? Others?
- A. As for all of our content marketing efforts, we seek to inspire the consumer to come to California through enticing and informative content.

87. What are your current KPIs/metrics for your social and owned properties? What specific metrics are you hoping to drive with each property?
- A. Our KPIs vary slightly by channel, but overarching, we are most interested in measuring our content's success by consumer engagement.
88. Can you outline the key responsibilities / mandates other agencies involved in the creation, production and paid distribution of digital and social content?
- A. Our global brand agency, global social agency, and Visit California content agency, along with Visit California staff, are the lead in the strategy and content creation. The local office handles about 20%+ of local content creation and manages the administration of all social media content pages via our content tracking tool, Kapost.
89. What Content Management System (CMS) is associated with the digital site(s) for which the successful applicant would be responsible?
- A. We utilize Drupal 7 and the individual country office updates and maintains the CMS for their specific country users.
90. What software / management programs do you currently use for the creation and distribution of consumer e-marketing newsletters?
- A. We utilize in-house Master DB to sync with our vendor's system which is Zeta.
91. Can you please provide a list of reporting / analytics software, which is currently in use across digital and social properties? Do you have on-going licensing which the successful applicant would be required to maintain?
- A. Google Analytics for website analytics. Have used Simply Measured for social, but will likely transition in the next fiscal year. There will be no requirement for the successful applicant to maintain any licenses.
92. Do you currently utilize Social Media Management software (e.g. Sprinklr) to manage social properties and content processes?
- A. We use Kapost as our content workflow tool and it plays a big role in social content management. We are currently out to RFP for a global social community management firm that will impact content process over the next year.
93. Is the RFP inclusive of expenses related to social promotion / amplification?
- A. From the brand advertising budget, separate from this RFP, we have funds for digital and social.
94. Are you able to provide additional information on the "informed connectors" audience?

- A. Through our research, we have identified key targets that we identify as our “informed connectors”, which is our key target market.
95. Under 'Proposal Requirements' you outline a number of items to be addressed in the RFP – is there any preference on how this should be presented? In any sequence? Would you like the content presented according to the order in Proposal Evaluation Criteria?
- A. You may layout the proposal in any order you deem best appropriate.
96. Can you provide additional information and if possible percentage weighting on how the budget lines should be prioritized – Travel Trade, Communications, Owned Channels?
- A. We welcome you to propose your thoughts based on your knowledge of the market.
97. The RFP lists a requirement for the “company” to have at least five years' experience. If Agency X is less than five years old, will you consider a senior multidisciplinary team with more than five years consecutive experience on numerous travel & tourism accounts who worked with a previous Agency Y who now work together for the same Agency X?
- A. No
98. Can you provide further clarity on the agency's scope with respect to digital strategy? Is SEM to be included in the agency budget?
- A. Paid social is funded from a different budget managed by MeringCarson, Visit California's global brand agency.
99. How are you measuring success for these marketing activities, specifically digital/online initiatives?
- A. Various factor are considered in measurement including time on site, click through rates and other factors.
100. Do you consider all other DMOs 'conflicts'? Anything else? (Cruise lines?)
- A. Visit California considers any destination that is in direct competition for visitation to be a competitor. Specific competitors within the market are not predetermined by the Visit California. If proposer thinks there is a potential conflict, then they must get a release signed by current clients in order to be considered.
101. How have you typically weighted your spend? (Comms/PR, Travel Trade, owned-channel management)

- A. Overall, we tend to have the focus on trade and PR activities with owned channels primarily being considered as an admin/overhead expense as a partial head count.
102. What are the three most important qualities you are looking for in an agency partner?
- A. Overall, we look for an agency that is well versed on all disciplines, connected and well respected within their markets to key partners, and has solid financial and administration skills.