

**CITY OF LAUREL, MS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:  
DIGITAL MEDIA SERVICES FOR TOURISM MARKETING**

**Proposals due on or before 12:00 p.m. CDT on September 19, 2025.**

**ABOUT VISIT LAUREL**

In 2022, the City of Laurel (the City) passed a 3% lodging tax that applies to hotels, bed and breakfast establishments and short-term rentals within the city limits. Revenue generated from the tax is earmarked for tourism promotion and operating expenses for the Laurel Jones County Visitor Center. By allocating funds towards tourism promotion, Laurel seeks to attract more visitors, stimulate economic growth, and enhance the overall visitor experience. The tourism programs and Visit Laurel brand are overseen by the City's Tourism Committee that was formed in 2023, and the committee has worked to establish the mission for Visit Laurel while also implementing a local event grant program and managing the operations of the Visitor Center.

The City coordinates its tourism marketing with the EDA of Jones County and its Visit Laurel & Jones County brand. There is considerable planning done to ensure that efforts by each entity support the other, rather than competing and diminishing returns. Some assets are shared, including some photo/video assets and public lists of tourism partners, but the brands, budgets, websites and oversight are separated.

**OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this Request for Proposal is to seek qualified digital agencies to support the City of Laurel, Mississippi's tourism marketing primarily through digital media tactics. Qualified agencies will have a working knowledge of the tourism industry. The City's desired partner will have the capacity to provide strategic counsel, actively promote the destination's message, amplify successes and position Laurel as a premier destination in the Gulf South for leisure travel at the national, regional and local levels.

*This RFP in no way commits the City to award a contract, to pay any costs in preparation of a proposal, or to contract for the goods and/or services offered. Although it is the City's intent to contract with the person/company that best meets the qualifications to complete the scope of work, the City may terminate the negotiations if they are unsuccessful in reaching an agreement on all matters including the scope of work and cost.*

Laurel, Mississippi is nationally recognized as the backdrop for HGTV's hit show "Home Town," featuring beloved local residents Ben and Erin Napier. The show draws millions of weekly viewers who are captivated by the warmth, hospitality, craftsmanship and character of small-town life in Laurel. This built-in audience is emotionally invested in the town—they've seen its homes, its people, and its story unfold on screen.

To date, tourism marketing has passively benefited from the show's popularity, with visitors seeking out Laurel simply through organic discovery. While the likeness of the Napiers has been used in past materials, we've never directly activated their personalities in a campaign with a deliberate call-to-action. That changes with this campaign.

We are developing a short, authentic invitation video featuring Ben and Erin Napier that will live on the City of Laurel's official tourism website. This personal message will invite fans of "Home Town" to take the next step—from viewer to visitor. The surprise of seeing familiar, trusted faces extending a personal invitation is a powerful conversion tool. It transforms passive interest into action, helping potential travelers envision themselves walking the same streets and exploring the real Laurel.

As stated above, the City's tourism program is funded solely by the proceeds of a 3% lodging tax. A key element of this campaign will be to extend the time that visitors spend in market. Laurel's prime location on I-59 and its proximity to many popular destinations (New Orleans, Jackson, Hattiesburg and Gulf Coast beaches), make it an ideal stop for travelers enroute. Another goal of this campaign will be to increase occupancy rates by targeting day trippers and encouraging multi-day vacations.

The primary assets used to promote Laurel's tourism efforts include:

1. **Promotion of Historic Downtown:** Laurel's downtown area boasts beautifully renovated historic buildings with an attractive mix of shopping, dining, recreational and lodging options. Guided and self-guided tours are available to explore the architecture and learn about the history of the area.
2. **Cultural Tourism:** Laurel celebrates its cultural heritage through events, museums, and festivals. Mississippi's first museum, the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, is home to a diverse collection of American and European artwork and hosts spectacular rotating exhibits and special events. Other attractions and community organizations showcase the rich local culture, including the Veterans Memorial Museum, Laurel Jones County Black History Museum, South Mississippi Fair and Laurel Main Street.
3. **"Home Town" Fame:** Laurel gained significant attention through the popularity of the HGTV series "Home Town" which follows the Napiers as they renovate and restore local homes. Visitors are able to shop a curated selection of goods reflecting the couple's love for craftsmanship at their trio of stores in downtown Laurel. There are also private tours available to view some of the homes featured on "Home Town." Plus, after eight seasons, there are many more merchants and spots to explore throughout Laurel for an "as seen on TV" experience.
4. **Outdoor & Recreation:** Laurel's proximity to natural attractions such as Lake Bogue Homa and the De Soto National Forest provides opportunities for outdoor recreation like fishing, hiking, and camping. The City also manages the Sportsplex and Natatorium, in addition to many parks and public fields/courts, offering venues for a variety of sports tournaments and casual recreation.
5. **Culinary Tourism:** Laurel offers a thriving culinary scene that is brimming with warm hospitality and diverse flavors. Visitors can savor classic comfort food and innovative dishes at local eateries, where fresh ingredients and Southern charm come together to create memorable dining experiences.
6. **Preservation and Restoration Efforts:** Laurel's efforts to preserve and restore its historic buildings and landmarks contribute to its appeal as a tourist destination. This commitment to preservation is made possible through strategic collaboration with public, private and non-profit entities, and this community approach can be highlighted in tourism materials and initiatives.

#### **DESTINATION WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA:**

- [www.laurelms.com/tourism](http://www.laurelms.com/tourism)
- The City does not have a dedicated social media platform for its tourism efforts. There is no plan to create a new account, nor is there staff available to provide ongoing management.

#### **SCOPE OF SERVICES**

The selected agency's responsibilities will include the below:

- Work in conjunction with the City staff, Tourism Committee and consultants to develop a digital marketing program to convert "Home Town" viewers and attract visitors from primary target markets. The agency may include non-digital strategies in their proposal if desired.
- The Tourism Committee is working to produce a video that will be an integral part of the assets used in this campaign. The video will consist of an invitation to visit Laurel from the "Home Town" principals. The city and its web team will be responsible for the video production and hosting the video on the city's tourism landing page ([www.laurelms.com/tourism](http://www.laurelms.com/tourism)). This RFP requires that the selected agency advise on the final execution of how this video is displayed, and ultimately, which a plan and budget for marketing vehicles to be used for distribution.
- Use data provided by the City, Google Analytics, Visit Mississippi or other third parties to optimize digital campaigns
- Provide a comprehensive monthly report of activity, campaign results and strategy updates.
- Regular campaign optimization to increase performance and Return on Investment (ROI), including:
  - Bid Optimization – adjust keyword bids to focus on visitors most likely to convert
  - Budget Allocation – monitoring campaigns to increase the budget for campaigns that provide the greatest ROI and decrease it in low-performance areas

- Ad Testing – test various ad elements to discover what is most effective (headlines, images, descriptions, display URLs, site link extensions, call-outs, call to actions, etc.)
- Audience Targeting – serve most relevant and compelling ads to the audience based on demographics, known interests, and likely decision-making criteria.
- Provide design services as needed for digital and print ad placements.

#### **AVAILABLE FUNDS**

The City will fund this contract at a maximum of \$80,000. This budget is based on creative production, media planning and placement, media placement fees, account management fees, and out-of-pocket expenses. The City reserves the right to adjust both the budget and related services.

**BILLING:** The City limits invoicing to one invoice per month. Each invoice should be on letterhead from the selected agency and include the month(s) for which payment is due as well as detail of work completed at the mutually agreed upon rate(s) or amount in the executed contract.

**CONTRACT TERM:** The contract will be for one year, beginning in October 2025 to end in September 2026.

#### **METRICS, REPORTING & EVALUATION**

Monthly reports should be received by 5<sup>th</sup> of the succeeding month. Reports should overview of KPIs such as clicks, CPC, CTR, view time, spend, etc. Reports should highlight top-performing campaign tactics as well as those areas performing less than desirable. Key insights and major action items should also be included in all reports.

#### **OFFICIAL CONTACT**

The City requests the proposer designate one person to receive all communications for clarification and verification of information related to this proposal. Please identify this point of contact on the Notice of Intent to Bid Form (Attachment 1).

#### **TIMELINE**

RFP available to agencies.	September 3, 2025
Final day to submit questions regarding this RFP.	Friday, Sept. 12, 2025 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
Questions answered	Monday, Sept. 15 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
<b>Proposals due by 12:00 PM CDT.</b>	<b>Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 by 12:00 p.m. CDT</b>
Proposals evaluated by RFP committee.	Sept. 22-24, 2025
Agencies under consideration may be interviewed; scheduled as needed.	Thursday, Sept. 25
Agency selected notified	Friday, Sept. 26
Contract and all documents needed for City Council approval due	Monday, Sept. 29 by 5:00 p.m. CDT
City Council meeting for approval of the committee's selected agency	Tuesday, October 7, 2025
Contract work begins as early as	Wednesday, October 8, 2025

## **SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS & DELIVERABLES**

Your response to this RFP must be submitted in the following format and labeled accordingly:

**A. Statement of Qualifications** – Provide a written statement of your firm's qualifications for providing the work as described in the Scope of Work.

**B. Tourism Experience** – Provide a written statement of your involvement in the tourism industry, specifically with DMO clients, industry memberships and resources.

**C. Organization Structure & Experience**

1. Name, address and telephone of the entity that will be contracted with and all trade names to be used.
2. Name, address and telephone numbers of the organization's principal officers and other owners.
3. Organizational chart of company, including any subcontractors who will work with the City.
4. Total number of employees including full time, part time and contract workers.
5. Short history of the company, especially as it relates to work in the tourism sector.
6. Hours of operation that staff will be available.
7. Max of **three** relevant case studies, including project goals with measurable KPIs and results. Creative work should be included for each case study.
8. Lists of current clients and travel/tourism clients (current and past)

**D. Conflict(s) of Interest** - The proposer must declare and provide details of any actual, potential or perceived conflict(s) of interest.

**E. Budget & Timeline** - Please provide a proposed, detailed budget based on a full year of activities, strategy execution, account management, out-of-pocket expenses, and estimated costs related to the tactics detailed in your proposal. Include costs by tactic or project, and a timeline for campaign planning and execution.

**F. ROI** – Please detail how tactics will be tracked and either expected results for this campaign or past results from comparable clients/campaigns.

**G. References** - Three references that are current accounts with contact names, email and phone numbers.

## **CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

1. Submittals in response to this request and respondents' participation in the process shall be at no cost or obligation to the City. The city reserves the right to, at any time, abandon or terminate its efforts to contract for any or all of said services without any obligation to any respondent.
2. Responses to this request and other materials submitted shall become the property of the City and will not be returned.
3. Respondent shall not contact any the City personnel or staff after this request has been advertised, except to ask questions as specified below under "Respondent Questions." Such contact will be considered cause for disqualification.
4. The City may waive any informalities or minor defects or reject any and all submittals.
5. The City reserves the right to reject any submittal if the evidence submitted by, or investigation of, such respondent demonstrates that such respondent or its subcontractors, in the City 's opinion, is not properly qualified to carry out the obligations of the Contract or to complete the Work contemplated therein.
6. All applicable laws, ordinances, and the rules and regulations of all governmental authorities having jurisdiction shall apply to the Contract throughout.

## **EVALUATION & SELECTION**

The City's Tourism Committee will evaluate and rate all proposals based on the criteria prescribed below.

## **SELECTION PROCESS**

Proposals meeting all requirements of the RFP will be evaluated and ranked based on the following selection criteria.

- [50%] Detailed plan of work, including costs of services, that meets the RFP objectives.
- [20%] Ability to illustrate return on investment for suggested strategies.
- [20%] Tourism industry experience and prior work.
- [10%] Overall evaluation of organization, references and ability to integrate with the city of Laurel's team and needs.

A contract will be awarded to the organization whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to the City, taking into consideration the criteria set forth in this RFP. Upon completing the selection process under this RFP, the City will notify the selected proposer and all other proposers who were not selected.

Following the Committee's selection, there will be a period of collaboration between the City and the selected agency to better define the agency's final Scope of Work. For the selected agency, an employee shall be designated as your contact if materials are needed or if there are questions. The agency will need to provide the City with a contract by Monday, September 29, 2025 with the full scope of work to be performed.

The City Council will meet on October 7, 2025 where the recommendation from the Tourism Committee will be presented for Council approval along with the contract. Following this meeting, the contract may be signed and work can begin as early as October 8, 2025.

The City's evaluations of proposals are confidential and as such, the City is unable to respond to any questions and/or requests for information as to why a company was not selected.

## **DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS**

Please submit your responses in hard copy and electronic format. All proposals should include a clear, concise narrative. Proposal format is open to presentation style but must include the aforementioned items. Please mail FIVE hard copies to:

The City of Laurel  
c/o Tourism Committee  
P.O. Box 647  
Laurel, MS 39441

Electronic submissions should be provided in PDF format and sent to [rjones@laurelms.com](mailto:rjones@laurelms.com) with the subject line: "RFP: FY26 Digital Marketing Agency Services." Proposals may not be faxed.

Submittals received in any manner not specifically set forth above shall not be accepted or considered. Submittals received after the deadline will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the respondent to ensure that the submittal is received by the specified deadline. The City will not be responsible for late or incomplete responses due to mistakes or delays of the respondent or carrier used by the respondent or weather delays. A postmark will not be considered proof of timely submission.

## **QUESTIONS**

E-mail Amanda Roll, [amandar@edajones.com](mailto:amandar@edajones.com), by Friday, September 19, 2025 at 12:00 p.m. CDT. No calls, please.