



ANSWERS TO RFP QUESTIONS

4.4.25

RFP: Why Now?

Q: What led you to develop and send this RFP? Would you be able to share the reason for the RFP (routine request per calendar year, end of current agency contract, looking for something new and different, etc.)?

A: As a quasi-governmental agency, it is prudent for Sonoma County Tourism to go out for RFP every few years to ensure our use of public funds is seen as responsible and transparent. Our contract with our current agency expires at the end of our fiscal year (June), so we are taking this opportunity to make sure we are aligned with the best partner for SCT moving forward.

Q: Where do you believe an agency partner can provide the most value to Sonoma County Tourism? We appreciate your candor in responding to this open-ended question, short-form or long-form.

A: Breakthrough creative work, consistent and cohesive coverage in top-tier outlets, ensures that SCT retains a positive image among our editorial targets and that key messaging is reflected in coverage. This results in increased visitation and overnight stays, boosts local economic impact, and maintains our reputation as a premier travel destination.

Q: Are there specific factors of your current PR program that are not working or that you would like to change, or other elements that you are seeking to add to a PR campaign? What themes/stories do you feel haven't yet been told?

A: At the end of any contract, it's imperative to evaluate its effectiveness. We look forward to hearing your creative ideas regarding the stories we could explore.

Q: What areas of your current agency relationship have been particularly successful or impactful? Are there any specific parts of the scope that you are hoping to see improvement in from your current agency?

A: We have cultivated a collaborative relationship and maintain open dialogue. We are always seeking fresh solutions that we have not yet considered.

Q: Are you happy with your current agency? Will the incumbent be invited to bid? Do they plan to bid?

A: Yes. We anticipate yes but are not privy to their plans at this time.

Q: What are your top three criteria for selecting your next agency partner?

A: Our evaluation criteria are outlined in Section 7 of the RFP. All proposals will be assessed based on those areas, and the agencies that best meet these criteria will be awarded the business.

Q: How many agencies are participating in the RFP process? Will all agencies have an opportunity to present their proposal?

A: Unknown at this point. Only the top candidates will be invited to present.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you are currently facing?

A: The issues related to the wine industry include impact from visitation and the media narrative surrounding San Francisco, ongoing geopolitical actions, and no new significant product offerings in the region.

Q: What do you believe is essential in an agency partner to work successfully with your team?

A: A genuine creative partner. An agency that offers research-driven ideas, is never content with the status quo, and monitors trends and opportunities to help SCT be a market leader or a creative powerhouse.

Q: What about working with your current agencies have you liked? What haven't you liked?

A: They are true partners with us.

Q: What more are you looking for from agency partners that you aren't getting now?

A: Nothing substantive comes to mind.

Q: What do you value out of a strategic, creative and media partner?

A: Fresh, insightful, and data-driven ideas. Staying laser-focused on our strategic plan KPIs and organizational goals. Collaboration, agility, and shared commitment to making disruptive moves to drive real results for our Sonoma County partners and stakeholders.

Q: Is on-site agency representation required for individual FAMs?

A: No.

Q: Does the selected agency need to be located in California?

A: We are not limiting the RFP to any geographical boundaries; however, we seek an agency with significant travel and tourism experience that fulfills the other requirements outlined in the RFP.

Industry Headwinds

Q: The RFP mentions co-developing campaign theming and messaging to address current headwinds and opportunities like the "Wine Country or All of Us" initiative. What are the most significant headwinds and opportunities you see at this moment that should be prioritized in the messaging?

A: Headwinds: the current political environment and declining alcohol consumption among Millennials and Gen Z, the impact of the tariffs and associated perception of the US brand in key international inbound markets, potential for a recession and pull-back on customer discretionary spending. Opportunities: the abundance in every category (experiences, agriculture, landscapes, etc.) that Sonoma County offers. SCT recently launched Wine Country for All of Us. This initiative, aimed at reinforcing Sonoma County's commitment to social inclusion within a polarized environment, is an important and meaningful step for the region. We will also partner with Wheel the World and develop an educational program

highlighting the Seven Secrets of Inclusive Hospitality to help ensure the initiative is integrated across the industry.

Q: Can you share any major 2025 initiatives, e.g., events, openings, or announcements the selected agency will have the opportunity to support and promote? Are there any key brand initiatives for 2025/26 to consider/emphasize? Major events, packages, new properties, etc.

A: 2025 will be a challenging year. We do not have any major new attractions or hotel products coming online, nor any significant new events. This is why we've launched the Signature Experiences, Wine Country for All of Us, and the THIS IS WINE COUNTRY campaign. All of these are designed to take a different approach to the current offerings. Yes, we have identified significant opportunities and major initiatives to pursue in the next fiscal year. We will be pleased to strategize tactics and methodologies with the RFP finalist.

RFP Process

Q: To clarify, should proposals be submitted to you directly, via email?

A: Yes, proposals should be sent to the RFP contact listed in section 3.1 of the RFP.

Q: Can you please confirm the desired format for proposals (i.e., a Word document that follows the RFP structure or a deck that follows the RFP structure)?

A: No specific requirement on our end. Proposals should be in a format that best reflects your capabilities, creativity and work.

Q: For planning purposes, are you able to disclose whether finalist interviews will be conducted virtually or in-person?

A: The finalist interviews will be in-person, held in Santa Rosa, CA.

Q: Who from SCT will be evaluating RFP submissions and attending agency Presentations?

A: Key members of the SCT Marketing and Communications team, as well as members of the SCT Marketing Committee, all of whom are stakeholders.

Q: The RFP mentions at that were not included, such as the contract example. Could we see a copy of that?

A: The agreement for services is available here: <https://www.sonomacounty.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Agreement-For-Services.pdf>

Restrictions and Potential Conflicts

Q: Can you list any possible conflicts of interest? Other destinations or destinations within Sonoma County?

A: The main conflicts would arise from an agency representing the lead DMO in a key competitive market: Monterey County, San Luis Obispo, Napa County, Walla Walla, Woodinville, and Willamette Valley. If the agency represents a wine region, we will need to assess the competitive nature of that engagement.

Q: Could you please clarify if there are any restrictions or additional requirements for non-U.S. agencies?

A: We are not limiting the RFP to any geographical boundaries; however, we seek an agency with significant travel and tourism experience that fulfills the other requirements outlined in the RFP.

Fiscal Year

Q: When is your fiscal year for media planning?

A: July 1 through June 30.

Scope of Work

Q: Under section 4 Scope of Services: for the Marketing Campaign (around media buys and advertising) would that be included within the PR agency's scope of work or would that fall under the creative agency should you decide on two entities?

A: If two different agencies were awarded, the media buy would be managed under the creative agency's scope, not the PR agency.

Q: Not included in the RFP scope is support for the website, social channels and owned content like newsletters and blogs. As it relates to the Consumer and B2B campaigns, will you need support with developing landing pages or assets for owned channels?

A: No, we have a digital marketing agency that manages these activities.

SCT Brand

Q: While the RFP mentions not foreseeing a full brand development project, it considers a redesign of the brand mark and updated language. Could you elaborate on the specific areas where SCT feels the current brand mark or language could be enhanced? What are the key objectives of such an update?

A: SCT remains committed to Life Opens Up and the brand architecture that supports it. However, the brand mark features a downward arch and is enclosed in a way that seems almost the antithesis of life opening up. A visual refresh of this mark, one that conveys a joyful opening, would be a tremendous way to help usher in brand 2.0. All brands need to evolve. While we're not seeking a new brand, we are interested in advancing the brand to meet the current and future needs of our key audience profiles.

Q: Was your Life Opens Up brand created by a marketing or ad agency?

A: It was created by a marketing agency.

Wine Country for All of Us Initiative

Q: Could you share more about the goals and initial activities of the "Wine Country for All of Us" social inclusion platform?

A: The campaign's near-term goal is to highlight and showcase the inclusion that is already taking place. The longer-term goal is to make Sonoma County as inclusive as possible.

Q: What elements of Sonoma County's identity would you like to see featured more in national media coverage? What aspects of the destination's identity do you feel are underrepresented or misunderstood in national media?

A: Please follow this link for more information about the [Wine Country for All of Us](#) initiative.

Q: Are you able to share the positioning statement for "Wine Country for All of Us"?

A: Thank you for asking! The positioning statement, "Wine Country for All of Us," reflects a deliberate commitment to fostering belonging among visitors and residents. Grounded in Sonoma County's long-standing dedication to inclusivity, the initiative celebrates the region's diverse history and invites everyone to experience Wine Country through their own lens. If you visit SonomaCounty.com and navigate to the Industry section, you can find the press release regarding this initiative.

Q: Can you detail a bit more what has been done to appeal to culturally and ethnically diverse travelers?

A: SCT has historically been inviting to and an advocate of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, our Wine Country for All of Us initiative launched in late January, highlights the region's belonging, welcoming, and inclusive ethos. Our current influencer partnerships align with the initiative pillars to highlight the inclusivity, diversity, accessibility, and sustainability—the core values and beliefs—of Sonoma County.

THIS IS WINE COUNTRY Campaign

Q: You mention this is a multi-year paid media approach launched in January 2025. What were the initial goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) for this campaign, and what preliminary results can you share? What are your expectations for how an agency would enhance or evolve this campaign?

A: Preliminary results have been favorable thus far. Our KPIs are detailed in our [Strategic Plan](#). Depending on the outcomes, we will collaborate with the agency to optimize the campaign. We rely on our agency partners to help us both create and convey our KPIs in the most salient and meaningful ways for our partners and stakeholders.

Q: Is there a style guide for the new THIS IS WINE COUNTRY campaign?

A: Yes. We will be delighted to share that with the selected agency.

Q: Has there been a messaging framework(s) developed with this campaign? Or are you looking for your selected agency to further develop the messaging under this campaign?

A: Yes, there is a messaging framework for the campaign. Since we just launched the campaign, we will review and evaluate it, and based on its performance after a certain period, we will adjust as needed.

Campaign Timing

Q: We understand the intent marketing period is November to April and there are 'always-on' efforts. Are there other campaigns or marketing cycles through the year?

A: Due to current market conditions, we are reevaluating our historic marketing periods and looking at how to best advertise throughout the year.

Q: What media channels fall under your 'year-round' always on efforts?

A: Social media as well as a select OTA partners.

Q: How many key campaigns do you typically run within a fiscal year, and what is the expected cadence?

A: Historically, one per year; however, our current initiative is a long-term endeavor.

Sustainability and Stewardship

Q: Our team has strong experience working with sustainability/stewardship initiatives. As a DSO, what are the top activities you aim to promote? Any we should know to stay away from?

A: We lean into partnerships and relationships with like-minded sustainability and stewardship organizations, including Kind Traveler, Leave No Trace, the [Global Sustainability Tourism Council](#), [Green Destinations](#), [Travel Foundation](#), and others. We avoid any that do not align with our brand.

Q: Great statistics on travel/visitation – are you planning a sustainability report for the various businesses who are part of SCT at any point in the future? Are there any county wide initiatives to speak to travelers who are more eco-conscious?

A: We have certainly talked about a more comprehensive assessment/inventory of business sustainability efforts, but do not have plans to create a business-focused sustainability report. We would be happy to discuss this with the agency!

Target Markets and Audiences

Q: Beyond California, what is your strongest inbound customer market? What has the most potential?

A: Aside from California, Dallas is our largest domestic inbound customer market. Currently, there is a seasonal direct flight from DFW to STS. We are working to make it available year-round. However, it's important to note that California accounts for the majority of visitation to Sonoma County. Another question might be, beyond the San Francisco metro area, where is your largest inbound customer market? In that case, it would be Los Angeles.

Q: Are there specific audience segments or markets that you feel are currently underserved or represent growth opportunities?

A: We, along with our key business sectors (wine) are always looking for ways to better connect with younger consumers. For the foreseeable future, we will continue to lean into wine consumers, however, we want to ensure we showcase the other experiences, including culinary, creative makers, outdoor experiences that elevate the region's appeal to travelers 35 years and younger.

Q: Currently, what drive and fly markets do you attract the most visitors from? Are there any specific markets you'd like to grow your tourism business in?

A: Bay Area, Seattle, Portland, SoCal (Burbank, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego), Phoenix, Dallas, New York, Chicago, and Miami. We aim to expand our long-haul markets, which include Chicago, New York, Florida, and international destinations.

Q: Who are your target audiences?

A: We are happy to share our audience personas and profiles with the finalists.

Q: How would you prioritize your target audiences when it comes to California vs. US vs International?

A: In the presented order. But, we would add that our goal is to reach audiences who will come to Sonoma County for longer than just a weekend stay. This is why it's critical to continue outreach to direct flight and key wine markets (New York, Miami, Chicago) to drive longer stay/greater revenue.

Q: What are your priority domestic markets?

A: Concentric circles beginning with the Bay Area and direct flight markets into STS.

Q: Are you interested in targeting additional markets and if so, which ones?

A: We collaborate closely with the Sonoma County wine industry, so we are interested in the markets that are vital for this group. These include Houston, Miami, Chicago, and New York. While we don't always feature these in our paid advertising, we will explore ways to align with the initiatives being undertaken by the wine industry in these markets. Refer to the answer above.

Q: Do you have research you can share regarding your target audience (demographics, psychographics, media consumption, etc.)?

A: Yes, we will share with the agency who is awarded the business.

Q: What are the current fly and drive markets for which you put paid media support? What kind of media support have you had in these markets in the past? What has been the most effective channels?

A: We will share that proprietary information with the selected agency.

Q: What is the current division of budget between always-on and seasonal peak Support?

A: Historically, it has been 85%/15%; however, this will evolve in the future.

Q: What are your key regional markets for visitation?

A: San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and direct flight markets: San Diego, Seattle, Portland, Phoenix, Dallas (seasonal), Palm Springs, and Las Vegas.

Competitors and Key Differentiators

Q: Who do you consider your competitive set? Can be direct (regional) or indirect (aspirational, destinations offering a similar visitor experience, etc.)

A: Our competitive set includes any destination that offers similar experiences. We adopt a slightly different approach to the competition compared to other destinations. Within the traditional destination competitive set, we list Napa, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Willamette Valley, and Walla Walla. However, we consider our competition to encompass anything that requires a similar level of consumer discretionary spending. Thus, we include consumer electronics, sporting goods, and certain luxury products.

Q: What do you believe differentiates your destination from competitors?

A: We will be happy to discuss this in detail with the agency that is awarded the business. We look forward to the agency's insights regarding this opportunity in the response.

Q: What differentiators set your destination apart from competitors?

A: Sonoma County's abundance is both a blessing and a curse: the vineyards, the coast, and the redwoods provide a wealth of options. Its proximity to the Bay Area is beneficial, yet the distance can also be perceived as a bridge too far. The temperate Mediterranean climate and growing

season foster hyper-local culinary experiences. The diversity of visitors and locals stems from a longstanding legacy of inclusion and support.

Conferences & Trade Shows

Q: Do you currently participate in any media trade shows/are you interested in attending in the future?

A: We primarily attend IMM North America, Germany, and the UK; Brand USA Europe; IPW; and Visit California media receptions and missions.

Q: How many trade shows per year does SCT participate in?

A: It depends on the budget. We participate in major shows such as IPW and IMEX focused on travel trade and business meetings, and we will also explore additional opportunities in the luxury space.

Media Relations/Public Relations

Q: Item 2. Media Relations & Press Outreach: The scope includes “Secure coverage in regional, national, and international publications.” Will the international component be in tandem with SCT team and an internationally based PR agency, or will the winning agency manage all international outreach alongside the SCT team?

A: The international aspect of this engagement will be minimal. The PR agency will mainly focus on domestic coverage. If an idea is presented that has international appeal, we will connect all relevant agencies to the effort.

Q: Item 2. Media Relations & Press Outreach: The scope includes “Organize media events, press trips and familiarization (FAM) tours for journalists and influencers.” Will the SCT team be involved in developing/managing the itineraries for press visits/FAM tours after the agency secures the visit/FAM tour? Or, is it the responsibility of the agency to manage all components of a press visit and FAM, including itinerary development and coordination?

A: Once the agency secures a press visit or FAM tour, SCT will participate in developing and managing the itineraries.

Q: You mention international media publication goals – what specific international markets are you targeting / wanting to target?

A: SCT has PR and Travel Trade representation in Germany and the UK. We also work with an agency in Australia on a project basis. We interact primarily on a reactive basis with media and travel trade in France, Italy, India, Mexico, Canada, the United Emirates, Japan, Korea, and similar locations. Additionally, we are collaborating with the Bay Area Host Committee on the FIFA World Cup (2026) to bring international travelers who attend matches in Santa Clara to Sonoma County.

Q: What has worked well from a PR perspective?

A: A focus on developing long-term, trustworthy media relationships.

Q: What has been missing from your PR approach?

A: A larger budget, which encompasses all elements of strategy and tactics. Given the current budget, the SCT team and our agency is required to be hyper-strategic, lean, and scrappy in every decision in each of the critical areas that fall under our purview.

Q: What is your biggest challenge from the PR side?

A: The evolving media landscape.

Q: Which media channels have proven most effective for SCT in the past 1-3 years? Can you provide a percentage/ratio of traditional vs. digital for both intent marketing and always on efforts?

A: We have one co-op print piece we do with Visit California. Other than that, we are almost exclusively digital. Whichever media channels are selected need to be measurable and be able to prove ROI. SCT brought the third hour of the Today show into Sonoma County in April 2023. The show was successful in showcasing Sonoma County's small businesses and the region, but we didn't see great conversion. We mention this in case an agency is considering adding a big broadcast opportunity to the pitch.

Q: Have you done any bi-lingual advertising/promo in Spanish for the region?

A: SCT has engaged in local community-focused bilingual advertising. Budget constraints have limited our ability to advertise bilingually. On the PR side, we have hosted outlets that distribute exclusively in Spanish.

Crisis Communications

Q: Noted that SCT has an existing crisis communication plan. How do you envision the third bullet point under "Strategic Communications Planning," which states, "provide crisis communication strategies and response planning," to differ from the overall plan?

A: Crisis communications is an ongoing strategic effort, and we must always be prepared. However, while we have a crisis communications plan, the agency should be well-versed in our communication goals in this area and ready to provide guidance and support as needed.

SCT Leadership/Media Training

Q: Who are the DMO's executives who wish to be positioned as industry thought leaders through expert commentary, speaking opportunities, and bylined articles?

A: Claudia Vecchio serves as the president and CEO. It is worth noting that we will have other SCT spokespersons available during specific crisis situations. We will discuss crisis management with the agency; however, in general, Claudia represents the industry, with Birgitt Vaughan being our primary contact with the media.

Q: Item 4. Thought Leadership & Industry Positioning: The scope includes "Develop key messaging and talking points for interviews and public appearances." Does SCT prefer that the agency develops these for industry/national media only, or will this also include local interviews and public appearances?

A: While this ultimately refers to all markets, the reality is that SCT has strong relationships with local media; therefore, the agency's focus is on gaining national coverage and developing the stories and messages that drive those opportunities.

Q: Do they already have experience being public facing? What public appearances have they held?

A: Yes. Please reference her LinkedIn profile for additional details.

Q: Are they media trained? Are they interested in media training?

A: Yes; no.

Q: Who on the leadership team would be most interested in thought leadership opportunities?

A: Claudia Vecchio, Frank Filice, Jonny Westom, Torie Clancy, and Birgitt Vaughan

Committees

Q: Vis a vis working closely with the marketing committee (we assume co-chairs primarily) and comms teams, can you speak to how those updates and meetings are organized with the comms agency? Namely organization and decision-making cycles. We would assume that once a comms plan is in place and approved that aside from regular updates and info sharing/gathering along the way, the agency is somewhat unfettered to execute its program.

A: The SCT Marketing Committee currently meets every two months. Once approved, plans are subject to change based on the organization's overall performance.

Media Hosting

Q: How many media visits do you typically host annually/what is your target?

A: This fiscal year, we have hosted nearly 50 media outlets. There are no specified targets, as this metric is organic. We're not focused on quantity; we prioritize quality in brand building.

Q: How are these currently managed: group v individual, comps v stipend for meals/experiences, onsite host?

A: Primarily on an individual basis, our in-house PR team creates customized itineraries. As for meals, we currently manage all arrangements (meals and lodging) internally and anticipate handling them differently in the future.

Q: How many writers and influencers do you typically host per year (individual + group FAM trips)? How many are hosted through partners such as Visit California? How would you like to see media hosting grow or evolve with the next partner?

A: For influencers, please refer to the above answer. Regarding FAMs, we host approximately 60 visits each year but are open to hosting more. As for Visit California, partners, including VCA, host between five and ten visits annually. We would be willing to host additional media if the agency can plan and facilitate the trips.

Q: In terms of FAM trips, is there a time of year you prioritize hosting?

A: We are open to visits during any season.

Q: How involved are partners with FAM trips?

A: Very much so. We can't conduct press trips without them!

Q: In the past year, how many media events were done?

A: It varies each year, but it was about ten last year.

Vendors

Q: Are there any local vendor preferences or qualifications that must be met to comply with the RFP requirements?

A: There are no local vendor preferences. We are particularly interested in agencies that understand the tourism industry and know how to navigate the traditional marketing clutter.

Q: Will the agency need to work with existing vendors, and if so, can you provide a list of them?

A: Yes. We have established relationships with research and digital marketing agencies. A list of our vendors will be provided to the winning agency.

Events

Q: What is your appetite for new event/activation ideas and desired recurrence?

A: We welcome this; however, please be advised that SCT is not in the event development business. We sponsor and promote events rather than plan and build them.

Influencers/Content Creators/Social Media

Q: Please provide examples of successful past Influencer & Content Partnerships.

A: We had a good collaboration with The Gay Beards (<https://www.instagram.com/thegaybeards/>), Jasmine (@jazwanderlust), and John Bartell (Bartell's Backroads, ABC10 Sacramento), Manuela Barón (@thegirlgonegreen).

Q: Do you have a current agency overseeing your social media channels, or is it managed in-house? Are you seeking a PR agency to manage your social media channels?

A: Our social media channels are managed internally. While we don't require the agency to oversee our social media, we are always open to ideas and opportunities to boost engagement and increase reach.

Q: How many content creators/ influencers does the destination strive to collaborate with annually?

A: We don't have a specific number, but this year we hosted around 50. Our paid partnerships consist of a mix of micro-influencers, depending on our budget. Additionally, our partnership with Visit California enables us to host some influencers with a larger audience. There are very few unpaid influencers for obvious reasons.

Q: In terms of influencer partnerships, are there any you're currently working on? Are these partnerships typically one-off or long-term?

A: Yes, they are typically one-off; however, we are open to exploring long-term partnerships.

Q: Do you have a network of creator ambassadors that can be leveraged in the year ahead?

A: We maintain a diverse roster of influencers and luminaries.

Q: Influencers - in terms of vetting influencer partnerships, we have a matrix we use. Let us know, given your thorough media application portal, if you have minimum criteria for influencer partnerships. Also, are influencer budgets considered part of the OOP? We prefer organic media overall but understand the increasing value of hyper-targeted influencer partnerships.

A: Currently, our agency vets influencers and makes recommendations. Our expectation is that the awarded agency will continue to do so.

Strategic Development

Q: As a creative agency, we are involved with strategy when developing designed campaigns. What will be the working relationship between the hired campaign administration and planning team and the creative team? Is the strategy portion collaborative with the creative team?

A: It is completely collaborative: the creative team drives the visuals and concepts, while SCT leads the strategic direction.

Creative Assets and Development

Q: Item 2. Creative Development – B2B: The scope outlines support to create a campaign with/for the SCT Business Development team. Is support needed for creative development of a campaign only, or will communications/PR support and/or paid media services be needed as well?

A: B2B PR efforts have been handled internally as the opportunities have been far and few between. We are open to proactive suggestions on how to attract more industry-related media.

Q: Item 2. Creative Development – B2B: The scope outlines work with the SCT Business Development team. Should any paid media planning account for a B2B audience, or are all other paid efforts focused on reaching consumers?

A: The paid portion of the B2B is minimal. Opportunities may appear from time to time, but nothing material at this time.

Q: Item 3. Promotions: Can you please clarify "retail-driven"? Is this a traditional incentive-based offer such as "stay an extra night free," or is SCT open to other concepts that integrate retail partnerships?

A: Retail-driven promotions focus on generating business through measurable incentives. A "stay an extra night" is a traditional approach to a promotion. We look forward to collaborating with the agency to discover innovative promotions that truly distinguish Sonoma County.

Q: Are existing image and video assets available, or should the creative budget include a photo/video shoot?

A: Yes, they are available and there is a separate budget for photo and video needs.

Q: Can you provide a list of creative assets that currently exist for the This Is Wine Country consumer marketing campaign (static vs. video, traditional vs. digital media, etc.)?

A: We will provide all assets to the agency that secures the business.

Q: Does SCT have a library of brand images/videos assets for the agency's use?

A: A vast library of brand images and videos. These resources are accessible to the agency, our local partners, media, and others.

Q: Will existing creative assets be provided to the agency for adaptation until new assets are developed?

A: SCT has just launched WINE COUNTRY FOR ALL OF US, along with some assets. These will need to be incorporated into the photo and video shoots that convey the disruptive nature of this campaign.

Q: Will we have access to all existing/previous photo and video assets to work from to further develop this brand?

A: Absolutely!

Q: Will the voiceover/brand narrative stay the same or is there flexibility to change?

A: The brand narrative will remain. Voiceover artists can certainly change.

Q: How much creative freedom will we have with creative deliverables?

A: As long as we uphold the brand architecture and overall campaign direction, the creative is always open for consideration. However, please note that all creative must go through an internal and external vetting process, including the SCT Marketing Committee.

Q: For creative production, can you please confirm if in addition to what was detailed in the Scope of work also need design for the following:

- **Emails**
- **Landing Pages**
- **Social Graphics**

A: No, we have a digital marketing agency that helps with email, website, and social media graphics.

Q: Will the agency have access to SCT's existing content library (images, videos, past coverage) to use in PR/influencer storytelling? Who owns the content created as part of influencer campaigns?

A: Yes, the agency will have access to all available assets. Content from influencers is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Brand Guidelines

Q: Would you please share all current, relevant brand guidelines/brand book?

A: Please consult our brand guidelines here: <https://www.sonomacounty.com/partners/brand-guidelines/>

Q: Will you be providing "Life Opens Up" campaign guidelines?

A: Life Opens Up is the foundational brand. SCT's commitment to Destination Stewardship defines the organization's identity, while Wine Country from All of Us represents our ethos. THIS IS WINE COUNTRY is the consumer-facing campaign that communicates much of the messaging of all those building blocks. It's not as complicated as it may seem – we would be happy to share this with the winning agency.

Q: Are there any brand positioning challenges or perception shifts the agency should address?

A: We continue to encounter challenges from the evolution of the wine industry and have launched THIS IS WINE COUNTRY with the aim of adopting a disruptive approach to wine destination marketing. Sonoma County's greatest challenge lies in its diversity. We continually grapple with how to communicate that diversity without complicating the message.

Media Buying

Q: Are you seeking a paid media agency partner as part of this RFP?

A: Yes, we are seeking an agency partner to manage our media buying as part of this RFP.

Q: Item 4. Media Buying: Regarding the note about payment upon completion, can we assume payment will be made monthly post-completion of that month's media spend?

A: Our payment terms are net 30 days.

Q: For the media buy, it notes that "SCT is not able to pre-pay media buys...the buy must be paid upon proof of completion." Does that mean payment will only be provided at the end of the fiscal year? Or if proof of completion is provided with monthly reporting, can payment then be received the month following for media that ran?

A: No, payment does not occur at the end of the fiscal year. Invoices and payments are submitted monthly. We just need to see proof that the placements ran as planned.

Q: Will you be sharing any previous performance or audience data with the awarded agency to help inform the media buy?

A: Yes, we will.

Q: Do you have any mandates regarding media buys (e.g., is Out-Of-Home required in all media buys)?

A: No, we do not.

Paid Search and Social Media

Q: Are paid search and paid social media expected to be managed by the selected agency?

A: No.

Promotions

Q: Have you done any retail-driven promotions in the past that you would deem a success?

A: Not recently, but we are open to creative ideas.

Q: For the retail-driven promotion, how do you define retail? Are the wineries included in this? Is it specific to shopping or a certain business segment?

A: We are open to interpretation and your suggestions. For us, retail-driven means promotions that demonstrate an actual increase in visitation and some with measurable metrics.

Partnerships

Q: Do you have any existing partnerships to be aware of/any in the pipeline? Are there key brands or influencers that you would like to align within 2025/26?

A: We would love to discuss this in-depth with the finalists and are excited to hear disruptive concepts.

Q: What existing brand partnerships do you have in place? What did they do well and what are some areas for improvement?

A: Those aligned with our sustainability efforts: none at the moment. N/A.

Q: Are there specific brands or categories SCT is already in discussions with for co-branded media efforts?

A: This is an area we are very much looking to the agency to help with. We have started and stopped on several brand partnerships.

Q: Do you ever collaborate with Travel San Francisco or Visit California for co-op programs?

A: All the time.

Q: Could you please speak to past partnerships in terms of specific organizations and media partners you've collaborated with?

A: SCT has longstanding, productive partnerships with VCA and Brand USA regarding publicity and media hosting opportunities.

Q: Do you have cooperative agreements with other cities in terms of cross pollinating/referrals i.e. visitors to LA being pitched itineraries in Sonoma County?

A: We have several established, professional relationships with other California destinations and always appreciate the opportunity to collaborate.

Successful Placements

Q: Can you share an example of a placement that was considered a win across SCT stakeholders?

A: Sonoma County Tourism has developed a strong, lasting relationship with New York-based freelance journalist [Kelsy Chauvin](#). In late February 2024, Sonoma County Tourism hosted a media luncheon at Charlie Palmer Steak in New York City, where Kelsy was an invited guest. Inspired by the event, Sonoma County Tourism later welcomed her to Sonoma County in April 2024 for an immersive exploration of our destination. During her visit, she was impressed by [Mine + Farm](#), a boutique inn that perfectly embodies the charm and character of Sonoma County. So touched by her experience, she nominated Mine + Farm for TIME magazine's World's Greatest Places 2024 list. On July 25, 2024, TIME revealed its highly anticipated annual list of the World's Greatest Places, as selected by its editors. The prestigious recognition received an [exclusive preview](#) on the TODAY Show (12.1M viewers nationwide), where it was showcased during both a live broadcast and on Today.com (2.4M UVPM).

Q: Are there any PR campaigns you admire or felt were most successful in the past?

A: We admire the Pause and Effect campaign.

Q: What is one early win that would move the needle most for you?

A: Heightened national broadcast exposure.

Q: What placements have had the biggest impact for you?

A: This question is both complex and multifaceted as we continually seek ways to measure these placements and correlate them with visitation, the Barcelona Principles, economic impact, and more.

Q: What are some of SCT's biggest PR wins in recent months? Why are these considered some of the biggest wins?

A: Please see SCT's "In the News," located here: <https://www.sonomacounty.com/sonoma-county-in-the-news/>

Desired Coverage

Q: What would your dream placement look like?

A: One in which audiences recognize that Sonoma County is a destination welcoming to all. Ideally, it would capture the true essence of the region- its people, communities, businesses, and landscapes to promote our initiative to attract audiences seeking a welcoming destination.

Q: Where do you currently see gaps in current media coverage and saturation? Is there an outlet or type of earned coverage the destination has always hoped for but has yet to achieve?

A: Broadcast and regional markets. As the business model has evolved, much of our previously secured coverage has shifted to pay-to-play. Our biggest challenge is acquiring this coverage given our budget constraints.

Q: What destination brands do you admire? Any examples of recent work that made you think, "I wish we'd done that!"?

A: "Everyone Under the Sun," by Greater Fort Lauderdale; Visit Mesa was named America's first-ever Autism certified city; "Accessible Oregon" by Travel Oregon.

Research, Data, and Analytics

Q: Do you have data around booking latency?

A: Yes.

Q: Historically, what have been your hardest working media channels & tactics? Are there any that you have tested and did not perform?

A: Assuming you mean the media and channels that best serve SCT, we have focused on and experienced sustained success with top-tier travel and tourism outlets, both glossy and online. Regarding social media channels, the organization regularly leverages Instagram and Facebook for consumer-facing audiences and LinkedIn for business audiences. Many believe that the key visitor demographic for Sonoma County is Boomers and Gen X. In fact, our research shows that Gen X and Gen Z (ages 35-50) are the primary visitors to Sonoma County. Many come with families, presenting an opportunity for us to discuss the experiences available, including those outside the wine industry.

Q: Can you share what your current analytics and MarTech stack looks like?

A: We are pleased to share all past performance information with the winning agency.

Q: Will you be providing market study and consumer insights and information?

A: Yes. However, current research can be found in the robust insights section of the website: <https://www.sonomacounty.com/partners/research/>

Q: Will the agency have access to past campaign data and analytics?

A: Yes.

Q: What systems or tools are currently used for reporting and analytics?

A: We utilize a variety of tools based on the department (GA4, Cision, Muckrack, etc.).

Q: Have you done any research with respect to 4th spaces and pursued collaborations with Eventbrite who has published a study on this important trend?

A: None to date with 4th spaces, but we utilize Eventbrite for ticketing and are open to exploring this further.

Measurement, Metrics, and Reporting

Q: What is your current metric of media exposure and success? Do you use Barcelona Principles?

A: Barcelona Principles. We have utilized them for the last seven years.

Q: What can be improved from your current PR reporting format?

A: It is time-consuming to compile the report. Understanding that the report offers an opportunity to review work that has been done and identify changes needed for greater success.

Q: Who reads the reports? What kind of information is most valuable to them?

A: Key stakeholders: strategic advice. Also, they are always looking for a mention of their property!

Q: Beyond general performance tracking, what are the most critical metrics SCT uses to evaluate the success of its marketing and communications initiatives?

A: Our strategic plan KPIs are SCT's most critical metrics. You can find our current strategic plan here: <https://www.sonomacounty.com/partners/strategic-business-plan/>. We are in the process of developing our next FY strategic plan.

Q: Are there specific KPIs or success metrics you use to evaluate marketing efforts? What data partnerships or sources do you currently have? (Tourism Economics, Arrivalist, Adara, Zartico, Visa Vue, Datafy, etc.)

A: Please refer to the question above concerning KPIs and metrics. Regarding partnerships, we utilize Tourism Economics, Longwoods, Near, and Dean Runyon.

Q: What specific key performance indicators (KPIs) are most important to you?

A: See answers regarding KPIs and the Strategic Plan above, but SCT's mission is to drive revenue generated from overnight visitation. While we have several marketing, sales, and communications KPIs, the bottom line is revenue, not the number of visitors.

Q: What KPIs and benchmarks are you measuring to determine the success of the current This Is Wine Country creative campaign?

A: Visits and overnight stays in Sonoma County are key metrics.

Q: What metrics are most important to the organization in measuring the success of marketing and PR efforts?

A: Refer to the question above about KPIs.

Q: How are you currently measuring the success of your paid media buys? How do you currently approach media attribution? Do you use a multi-touch attribution model,

or is success primarily measured through last-click conversions?

A: We receive monthly performance reports from our agency, which we review and adjust as needed. SCT utilizes NEAR pixel tracking to measure effectiveness and attribution, based on actual market visitation.

Q: What are the primary success metrics for SCT in this engagement over the two-year term?

A: For both earned and paid, our main success metrics are visitation and overnight stays.

Q: What return on investment (ROI) measures are most valued by your organization (e.g., economic impact, visitor spend, occupancy rates)?

A: Please consult the Strategic Plan for a detailed outline of the most important KPIs and measures.

Budget

Q: Given the approximate \$9.5 million budget for FY25-26, could you provide a general breakdown of how funds are typically allocated across different marketing and communication activities?

A: As of April 2, we anticipate the allocation for FY 25-26 of the SCT budget to be:

- Admin – 20%
- Travel Trade – 5.13%
- Marketing – 37.69%
- Business Development – 14.71%
- Community Engagement – 14.12%
- PR/Communications – 8.34%

Q: Would you be open to allocating project budget to research and strategy development in support of refining ongoing marketing efforts?

A: Yes, research falls into a different budget category and can potentially support ongoing marketing efforts.

Q: Is the creative retainer inclusive of account management fees for strategy and strategic media planning? Or can fees other than commission come out of the media budget of \$750K-1M?

A: Yes, it's inclusive of strategic media planning. No additional fees can come from the media budget other than media buying fees.

Q: Do you have an additional budget for hosting media and influencers? If so, what is that budget?

A: Yes, we do. It fluctuates yearly. We will collaborate with the awarded agency to enhance the efficiency of the outcome.

Q: Does the budget incorporate both domestic and international FAM trips?

A: Yes.

Q: Regarding the budget, if one agency is selected, do the fees still have to align with the \$13K creative and \$12K PR budget breakdown?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you have a budget for paid influencer partnerships?

A: Yes.

Q: How much support in terms of average monthly agency hours does SCT require? Please specify Creative vs PR, if available.

A: We have a monthly fee cap: \$12K for PR and \$13K for Creative. The number of hours may vary from month to month and project to project.

Q: Have you allocated a budget to create new content (stills and videos) for brand development?

A: Yes, this comes from a budget separate from the fees.

Q: Can you provide a detailed breakdown of the total advertising budget by media channel (e.g., TV, digital, radio, OOH, social media)? Or, preferably, can you provide a copy of a current or past marketing plan?

A: We will gladly share our current and past marketing plans with the winning agency.

Q: How has the media budget allocation evolved over the past 2-4 years, and what changes are anticipated?

A: Our media budget reflects economic fluctuations.

Q: Are media management fees to come from the allotted \$750k to \$1MM in media spend, separate from the \$25K service fee outlined in the RFP for PR and Creative?

A: The media management fee will be deducted from the allocated media spend, separate from the service fee.

Q: Is there a separate budget for foundational brand work on the mark and the promise?

A: No, all brand work must come from the \$13K Creative Budget.

Q: Are PR expenses such as influencers or FAM Trips assumed to be part of the \$750k to \$1MM in media?

A: Yes, the PR expenses for influencers and FAM trips will come from a separate budget.

Q: Can you confirm whether the \$12,000/month PR agency fee is expected to cover all services outlined in the PR scope – including influencer marketing, FAM coordination, and crisis response – or if additional project-based budgets may be available for specific initiatives?

A: Influencer marketing is a separate budget item. Crisis response is included in the regular PR budget (unless we experience a significant crisis such as a major wildfire or act of terrorism. In that case, an additional budget will be found). Project-based budgets are available, depending on the overall performance.

Q: Would you be able to share agency Average OOP in past 5 years yearly or monthly?

A: OOP to be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Vis a vis the media buy payment terms, we've done a fair amount of media buying for another client. We negotiate terms that deliver the campaign with payouts within roughly 30-60 days of execution. Can you speak to your payment terms with more specificity? In other words, how quickly after the executed campaigns do you reimbursed outlayed costs?

A: Net 30.

Q: Does the \$750k-\$1M paid media budget cover both the Intent Marketing and Always On efforts? Or is there an additional budget to support either?

A: Yes, that is our all-in advertising budget (including agency commission, which is why we like to keep the commission as low as possible).

Q: What is the estimated scope of time and workload per month? Will there be specific hourly or project expectations within the \$13,000 budget/mo for the creative agency?

A: With input from the awarded agency, SCT will define the scope of work, expectations, and deliverables. Note that it is often a flexible scenario depending upon the organization's needs.

Q: Media spend is stated as "all in," including both working media and fees. Is there an expectation for a commission-based model, or is a fee-based model also acceptable for media planning and buying programs?

A: We expect the agency to have a fee/fees for media buying. Beyond that, we haven't considered a different buy structure. But, we're definitely open to considering a more effective approach!

Q: What is the budget for production and execution costs of any promotional materials?

A: The budget fluctuates year by year. There is a separate budget for execution of promotional materials.

Q: Would the redesign of the brand mark or updates to the brand promise language fall within the budget allocated for creative work?

A: Yes, it will need to fall within that budget.

Q: Could the budget be structured to allow for front-loaded spending rather than requiring an even monthly distribution of funds?

A: Of course.

Q: What do you consider proof of completion?

A: On the media buying side, proof of payment will suffice.

Q: Are there any insurance requirements? If so, what are they?

A: Yes. Because the agency will be required to work, from time to time, in Sonoma County, the insurance requirement is outlined in the agreement. This is why we want EVERYONE interested in submitting a proposal to ensure that the agency will be able to comply with the levels of compliance. In the case of this professional services contractor(s), the insurance requirement is stated as:

5.2 Insurance. With respect to performance of work under this Agreement, Contractor shall maintain and shall require all of its subcontractors, consultants, and other agents to maintain insurance as described below. Should the scope of work change, with additional activities included within, SCT reserves the right to require additional insurance.

5.2.1. Workers' Compensation Insurance (if Contractor has employees). Workers' compensation insurance with statutory limits as required by the Labor Code of the State of California. Said policy shall be endorsed with the following language:

This policy shall not be cancelled or materially changed without first giving thirty (30) days' prior written notice to the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, Inc.

5.2.2 General Liability Insurance. Commercial general liability insurance covering bodily injury and property damage using an occurrence policy form, in an amount no less than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) combined single limit for each occurrence. Said commercial general liability insurance policy shall either be endorsed with the following specific language or contain equivalent language in the policy:

- a. The Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, Inc. its officers and employees, is named as additional insured for all liability arising out of the operations by or on behalf of the named insured in the performance of this Agreement.
- b. The inclusion of more than one insured shall not operate to impair the rights of one insured against another insured, and coverage afforded shall apply as though separate policies had been issued to each insured, but the inclusion of more than one insured shall not operate to increase the limits of insurer's liability.
- c. The insurance provided herein is primary coverage to the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, Inc. with respect to any insurance or self-insurance programs maintained by SCT.
- d. This policy shall not be cancelled or materially changed without first giving thirty (30) days' prior written notice to the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, Inc.

5.2.4. Documentation. The following documentation shall be submitted to SCT:

- a. Properly executed Certificates of Insurance clearly evidencing all coverages, limits, and endorsements required above. Said Certificates shall be submitted prior to the execution of this Agreement. Contractor agrees to maintain current Certificates of Insurance evidencing the above-required coverage's, limits, and endorsements on file with SCT for the duration of this Agreement and assumes responsibility to automatically provide renewals without prior notification from SCT.
- b. Signed copies of the specified endorsements for each policy. Said endorsement copies shall be submitted within thirty (30) days of execution of Agreement.
- c. Upon SCT's written request, certified copies of insurance policies. Said policy copies shall be submitted within thirty (30) days of SCT's request.

5.2.5. Policy Obligations. Contractor's indemnity and other obligations shall not be limited by the foregoing insurance requirements.

5.2.6. Material Breach: If Contractor, for any reason, fails to maintain insurance coverage which is required pursuant to this Agreement, the same shall be deemed a material breach of this Agreement. SCT at its sole option may terminate this Agreement and obtain damages from Contractor resulting from said breach. Alternatively, SCT may purchase such required insurance coverage, and without further notice to Contractor, SCT may deduct from sums due to Contractor any premium costs advanced by SCT for such insurance. These remedies shall be in addition to any other remedies available to SCT.

We HIGHLY encourage all potential respondents to read the agreement thoroughly. While we will consider some modifications, for the most part, this is the agreement terms we will require all agencies to adopt.

Group Travel and Meeting Planners

Q: What are the primary objectives for reaching meeting planners, travel agents, tour operators, and wholesalers? Are there specific target segments within these groups that you would like to prioritize?

A: Sonoma County Tourism aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Sonoma County as a leisure and meetings destination. These are two distinct market segments, with the leisure market being mainly international (Canada, Mexico, UK, Germany, and Australia) and the meetings industry focusing on domestic meeting planners.

1. Meeting Planner goal: Provide meeting planner clients with advertising assets and graphics that promote Sonoma County as a premier destination. Assets include digital ads, newsletters, web presence, print ads, tradeshow booth, client activations, giveaways and amenities, apparel, etc.
2. Leisure Goals: Similar to #1, tailored for a different audience.