



USA

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Brand USA

Brand USA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Canada PR Representation

November 15, 2024



INTRODUCTION

As the destination marketing organization for the United States, Brand USA's mission is to increase incremental international visitation, spend, and market share to fuel the nation's economy and enhance the image of the USA worldwide.

Established by the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 as the nation's first public-private partnership to spearhead a globally coordinated marketing effort to promote the United States as a premier travel destination and communicate U.S. visa and entry policies, Brand USA began operations in May 2011.

As one of the best levers for driving economic growth, international travel to the United States currently supports 1.2 million American jobs* and benefits virtually every sector of the U.S. economy. Since its founding, Brand USA has worked with more than 900 contributing organizations to invite the world to explore the exceptional, diverse, and virtually limitless travel experiences and destinations available in the United States of America.

According to studies by Oxford Economics, over the past seven years Brand USA's marketing initiatives have helped welcome 7.5 million incremental visitors to the USA, benefiting the U.S. economy with nearly \$55 billion in total economic impact, and supporting more than 50,000 incremental jobs each year.

Brand USA's operations are supported by a combination of nonfederal contributions from destinations, travel brands, and private-sector organizations plus matching funds collected by the U.S. government from international visitors who visit the United States under the Visa Waiver Program.

For industry and partner information about Brand USA, please visit TheBrandUSA.com.

For information about exceptional and unexpected travel experiences in the United States, please visit Brand USA's consumer website at VisitTheUSA.com.



PURPOSE

The purpose of this RFP is to identify the appropriate public relations and communications firm (Representative Firm) to represent Brand USA in Canada. The selected Representation Firm will be considered Brand USA's in-market expert, with the purpose of helping to build and maintain top-of-mind awareness of the USA as a premier travel destination in order to increase international visitation, spend, and market share for the U.S. As an extension of the Brand USA team in market, the Representation Firm will ensure all in-market activity represents Brand USA in ways that support the organization's strategies and mission, while protecting and preserving our integrity and brand.

BACKGROUND

Brand USA is the United States' destination marketing organization that promotes international tourism to the United States. The Canadian market remains one of the United States' most important international sources of visitors. This PR activity aims to raise awareness of U.S. travel offerings, encourage travel to the U.S., and further strengthen Brand USA's position as a leading global travel destination for Canadian travelers.

The organization's public relations strategy focuses on promoting the entirety of the U.S. and Brand USA's international marketing initiatives through a variety of earned media initiatives, Brand USA owned events and brand partnerships. A comprehensive media and public relations plan in Canada is an integral part of Brand USA's overall effort to promote the wealth and breadth of experiences and range of destinations available in the United States, as well as to support key marketing messages, initiatives and the international storytelling pillars.

OBJECTIVES

- **Increase awareness** of the United States as a travel destination among Canadian consumers, travel professionals, and media.
- **Position Brand USA** as the leading resource for travel planning and inspiration to the U.S.
- **Drive engagement** and conversion of Canadian travelers, especially in key regions (e.g., Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia).
- **Highlight diverse U.S. destinations**, experiences, and cultural offerings that appeal to Canadian audiences.



SCOPE OF WORK

A. Media Relations

- **Strategic Media Outreach & Media Relations Building:**
 - Develop and execute a targeted media outreach plan to build relationships with Canadian journalists, secure feature placements, and drive coverage of Brand USA's destination offerings and campaigns.
 - Devise a communications strategy in the Canadian market that addresses visitation to the USA including its gateways and 'beyond the gateways,' to showcase the plethora of travel opportunities for Canadian visitors.
 - Amplify Brand USA's programs, partnerships and initiatives in the Canadian market with an eye toward generating 'earned media' coverage and elevating interest in the USA as a travel destination.
- **Press Materials:**
 - Create tailored/bespoke press releases, fact sheets, press kits, and media advisories in both English and French (as appropriate for Canadian audiences). Amplify announcements and releases also provided by Brand USA's global communications team at head office.
 - Highlight the diversity of U.S. tourism offerings, seasonal promotions, and new initiatives from Brand USA.

B. Media Tours & Press Trips

- Organize and coordinate **media familiarization trips** for Canadian journalists, bloggers, and influencers to visit U.S. destinations. The objective is to generate firsthand content and authentic coverage.
- **Press Trip Coordination:** Coordinate and manage all logistics for Canadian journalists attending U.S.-based media events, fam trips, and influencer campaigns, in collaboration with head office.



C. Influencer Partnerships

- Identify and engage with Canadian influencers (social media, travel bloggers, vloggers, and content creators) with strong followings in the travel, lifestyle, and family niches, etc. (note: Brand USA currently has a global social media community management agency and so this would be in coordination with them when there is overlap, and additive in nature, especially as it relates to supporting Brand USA's Visiting Journalist program).
- **Influencer Campaigns:** in collaboration with the global communications team and social media teams, develop campaigns that highlight U.S. travel experiences, focusing on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and blogs. This would be done in coordination with Brand USA's social media community management agency and head office.
- Provide influencers with content guidelines and Brand USA messaging to ensure alignment with overall brand strategy.

D. Event Marketing

- **Host Media Events/Pop-ups/Activations:** Coordinate press events, activations, media and influencer pop-ups, media roundtables, or influencer meet-and-greet sessions in key Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver) to create buzz about Brand USA's latest offerings. Drive and maximize media interest for any Brand USA sponsored events including B2B, travel trade events and consumer-facing events. (This could include partnerships such as with the Toronto International Film Festival and in-market trade missions).

F. Crisis Communications & Media Monitoring

- Work with head office in the event of a crisis and ensure proactive media relations in case of unforeseen events impacting the U.S. travel market.
- Provide ongoing **media monitoring** and reporting, tracking coverage, key media mentions, and sentiment analysis across all platforms.



QUALIFICATIONS

1. Experience in Travel & Tourism PR:

- **Expertise in Tourism Marketing:** A firm with a proven track record in destination marketing and tourism-related campaigns is highly preferred. They should have experience handling travel and tourism accounts, ideally at an international level, including working with destinations, airlines, travel booking providers, other travel-related brands.
 - **Account Team:** provide an overview of the proposed account team along with the accompanying resumes/ CVs to demonstrate their qualifications. Please be specific and include recent accomplishments and achievements.
 - Staffing requirement: at least one PR account director dedicating 100% of their time to the account. And a secondary account manager dedicating 100% of their time to the account.
- **Relevant Case Studies:** The firm should be able to provide examples of successful campaigns that demonstrate their ability to drive tourism, enhance destination awareness, and generate media coverage in both traditional and digital spaces.

2. Understanding of U.S. Tourism and Canada-U.S. Relations

- **Familiarity with U.S. Tourism Policies:** The PR firm must have a strong understanding of Brand USA's goals, objectives, and strategies, as well as any federal or regional tourism initiatives that impact U.S. travel.
- **Cross-Border Knowledge:** Given the proximity between Canada and the United States, the PR firm should demonstrate an understanding of Canadian travelers' unique preferences and behaviors regarding U.S. travel. This includes knowledge of how to target Canadian travelers and address the nuances of cross-border travel.

3. Media Relationships in Both Canada and the U.S.

- **Strong Media Network:** The PR firm must have established relationships with Canadian media outlets, journalists, influencers, and bloggers within the travel, lifestyle, and tourism industries. This would include major outlets in cities with high Canadian outbound traffic to the U.S., such as



Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, and Ottawa. [This should be across print, digital and broadcast].

- **Proven Media Results:** The firm should be able to showcase past successes in securing earned media placements in major Canadian outlets and U.S.-based publications that target Canadian travelers.

4. Cultural Sensitivity and Multilingual Capabilities

- **Bilingual/Multilingual Capabilities:** If the PR firm operates in Quebec or other bilingual regions, it would be beneficial for them to offer services in both English and French. Brand USA often tailors its messaging to reach both English- and French-speaking Canadians.
- **Cultural Competence:** The firm must understand the cultural differences between the U.S. and Canada and be able to tailor communications accordingly.

5. Digital and Social Media Expertise

- **Influencer Engagement:** The firm should be skilled in identifying and working with Canadian influencers who have audiences interested in U.S. travel. They should be able to launch and manage influencer marketing campaigns and measure their impact on tourism.

6. Strategic Planning and Crisis Management

- **Strategic Marketing and Communication Plans:** The firm must be able to develop and execute strategic communications and marketing plans that align with Brand USA's mission and goals.
- **Crisis Management:** Experience in crisis communication or managing sensitive issues related to tourism, such as travel advisories, border restrictions, or natural disasters, is valuable.

7. Local Knowledge and Network

- **Regional Insights:** A PR firm in Canada that has deep local knowledge in key provinces or territories (like Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec) and can execute region-specific strategies is ideal. Understanding local preferences, travel patterns, and seasonality trends can help in crafting more effective communications campaigns.



- **Partnerships and Alliances:** The firm should have a network of local industry stakeholders, including tourism boards, associations, hotels, attractions, and transportation partners (e.g. airlines), which could be leveraged to help elevate Brand USA's visibility.

8. Measurement and Reporting

- **Proven Measurement Tools:** The PR firm must demonstrate their ability to measure campaign success using both traditional and digital KPIs. Metrics should include media impressions, engagement rates, website traffic, and leads generated for U.S. tourism businesses.
- **Reporting and Analytics:** The firm should provide clear, actionable reports that measure the return on investment (ROI) and performance of PR campaigns for Brand USA.

9. Alignment with Brand USA's Mission

- **Mission Alignment:** The PR firm must show that they understand and align with Brand USA's mission to increase international travel to the U.S. and foster a positive image of the country as a diverse and welcoming destination for tourists.

BUDGET

The annual budget including retainer and PR activation is: \$400,000 total FY25 activation budget. PR activations can include PR partnerships, tourism pop-ups/events promoting the USA destination to key media and influencers.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Proposals may be rejected if they do not include all deliverables. Proposers wishing clarification of this RFP must submit questions in writing to Brand USA, no later than November 1, and sent by e-mail to RFPadmin@TheBrandUSA.com. Questions will not be answered on calls, with the exception of meetings with scheduled finalists during, or after the meeting. Company names will be removed from the published question/answer document. Duplicative questions, irrelevant questions and questions already addressed in this RFP may not be published. Pitches will not be accepted outside the RFP process.

Costs for developing proposals are entirely the responsibility of the proposer and shall not be



reimbursed by Brand USA.

1. **Notice of Intent to Bid** must be received by **December 6** (due by 5:00 PM EDT).

The notice shall be sent by e-mail to RFPadmin@TheBrandUSA.com. The NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID, is nonbinding; however, it ensures the receipt of all addenda related to this RFP. Proposals will be accepted only from applicants who submitted a timely NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID.

2. **RFP Responses must contain the following information:**

- a. Executive Summary. Proposal submission length should not exceed 30 pages.
- b. No Conflict of Interest: Client relationships that could potentially be considered a conflict of interest must be listed.
- c. Contract Manager/Team: identify one individual on the proposer's account team who will manage the Canada PR agency review. Include resumes, or descriptions of anyone to be involved with Brand USA Canada PR Agency review
- d. Case Studies.
- e. Direct answers from the "Questions for You" section. Include the question and your answer. Do not assume we will locate answers to these questions spread throughout your proposal. Failure to provide direct answers may negatively impact your submission.
- f. Specific Budget.

3. **Certification Form**: Must be signed and accompany all RFP Response submissions.



TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

This tentative schedule may be altered at any time at the discretion of Brand USA. Brand USA reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, or any part thereof; waive an informality in the proposals and accept the proposal that best meets the needs of Brand USA.

A. Proposal Released	Nov. 18
B. Written Questions (due by 5:00 PM EDT)	Nov. 25
C. Written Questions Answered and posted to Brand USA website	Dec. 2
D. Notice of Intent to Bid Due (due by 5:00 PM EDT)	Dec. 6
E. Proposal Due (due by 5:00 PM EDT)	Dec. 20
F. Notification and Scheduling of Finalist Interviews	Jan. 3
G. Finalist Presentation/Interviews	Week of Jan. 6
H. Notice of Intent to Award Contract and Public Posting	Jan. 10

DELIVERY OF PROPOSAL

Proposals should be e-mailed to RFPadmin@TheBrandUSA.com. We will acknowledge receipt, so if you do not receive a receipt notification within two business days, please contact us. If the file size of your proposal is too large to email, or send via a FTP service, contact us and we will make arrangements.

EVALUATION AND CONTRACTING

All proposals satisfying the requirements of this Request for Proposals will be evaluated to establish which of the providers best fulfills the needs of Brand USA and this project. This Request for Proposals in no way commits Brand USA to award a contract, to pay any costs in preparation of a proposal, or to contract for the goods and/or services offered.

Brand USA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received as a result of this request, to negotiate with all qualified providers or to cancel this Request for Proposals. After awarding the contract, the schedule will include a period of collaboration between Brand USA and the selected Contractor to better define, elaborate upon, and fix the Contractor's final Scope of Work and general Terms and Conditions.



ATTACHMENT 1

NOTICE OF INTENT TO BID

Due: [Date]

SEND TO: rfpadmin@thebrandusa.com

NAME OF BIDDER / COMPANY:
CONTACT PERSON:
MAILING ADDRESS:
TELEPHONE:
FAX:
E-MAIL ADDRESS:
SIGNED:



ATTACHMENT 2

CERTIFICATION

Please include this statement as part of the Proposal

Certification Statement

By submission of this proposal and authorized signature below, Proposer certifies that the undersigned corporate officer has authority to bind the bidder to the terms of this Proposal and hereby certifies on behalf of the bidder that:

1. He/she has read and understands all commitments and terms of this Proposal.
2. The information contained in this Proposal is accurate.
3. Proposer's quote is valid for at least 120 days from the date of proposal's signature below.
4. Proposer understands that if selected as the successful Proposer, he/she will have ten (10) business days in which to complete contract negotiations, if any, and execute the final contract document. Date of execution can be extended by mutual agreement of contractor / Brand USA.

Authorized Signature

Typed or Printed Name

Title

Date

Official Contact

Brand USA requests that 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 below:

Official Contact Name

Phone Number

Official Contact Title

Facsimile Number

Email Address

Street, City, State, Zip



ATTACHMENT 3 FOR BRAND USA USE ONLY

Bid/Proposal: _____

Evaluated By: _____

Date: _____

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation committee will judge each written proposal based on the following criteria:

[Template note: Evaluation criteria should be aligned with deliverables.]

	MAX. POINTS	SCORE
Demonstrated success leading and managing in-market PR representation for Brand USA with deep experience in tourism/lifestyle PR	30	
Demonstrated success with media relations, influencer engagement, creative pitching, event management for PR activations, and other communications related activity supporting Brand USA's PR, consumer marketing and trade activities.	25	
Qualified staff to manage the PR requirements	25	
Cost effectiveness	20	
TOTAL POINTS	100	

Brand USA is committed to seeking significant participation in its contracts by small businesses and by small businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and persons with disabilities ("small, disadvantaged businesses"). Small and small, disadvantaged businesses shall be defined in accordance with the Small Business Administration ("SBA") regulations set forth at 13 C.F.R Parts 121 and 124.

Brand USA will award up to five additional points to competitive search respondents who meet



the criteria described above or other such criteria that Brand USA believes reflect the spirit of this section e.g., a diverse employee base or board of directors.