

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Morris County Tourism Bureau Strategic Plan & Benchmarking Study

Issued by:

c/o Ms. Samantha Rutledge
Director, Strategic Partnerships
Morris County Economic Development Alliance /
Morris County Tourism Bureau
6 Court Street
Morristown, NJ 07960

Date Issued: Friday, January 16, 2026

RFP Submission Deadline: Friday, February 13, 2026

Anticipated Award Announcement: Friday, February 27, 2026

1. Introduction

The Morris County Economic Development Alliance (MCEDA), operating as the Morris County Tourism Bureau (MCTB), invites qualified consulting firms to submit proposals for a **Strategic Plan & Benchmarking Study**. This study will help shape the long-term direction of the Tourism Bureau by aligning its mission, programs, governance, funding model, branding, and marketing approach with best-in-class practices from comparable Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) throughout the Tri-State and Northeast region.

MCTB is entering a pivotal period of growth—preparing for the significant tourism opportunities presented by the USA250 commemorations, expanding its agritourism portfolio, elevating year-round visitation, and advancing the county’s evolution from a Tier 3 day-trip destination to a Tier 2 destination known for overnight stays and weekend visitation. To support this trajectory, MCTB seeks a comprehensive, data-driven strategic plan grounded in robust benchmarking analysis, stakeholder engagement, and clear, actionable recommendations that will guide both immediate priorities and long-term organizational development.

2. Project Purpose

MCTB seeks a consultant to deliver a Strategic Plan & Benchmarking Study that will:

- Evaluate MCTB’s current operations, staffing, funding, governance, and marketing.
- Benchmark against similar county/regional DMOs in the Northeast and Tri-State region.
- Assess opportunities for growth, modernization, and financial sustainability.

- Deliver a Strategic Plan with clear priorities, timelines, KPIs, funding models, and governance recommendations.
 - Outline how data platforms already licensed by MCTB can be better utilized to guide decision-making.
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3. Data Provided to the Consultant

The hired consultant will have access to the following data sources:

Symphony Data Intelligence Platform

(Provided through Tourism Economics / Oxford Economics)

Includes:

- Economy & labor market data
- Lodging performance
- Marketing performance
- Sales intelligence
- Summary reports
- Visitor insights (air passengers, global city travel, international state travel)

Lightcast

Includes:

- Workforce and labor market data
 - Creative economy trends
 - Industry cluster analysis
 - Economic impact multipliers
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4. Scope of Work

The consultant will complete the following tasks:

A. Benchmarking Analysis

- Identify 5–8 comparable county/regional DMOs in the Tri-State & Northeast region.
- Compare governance models, revenue strategies, staffing, marketing budgets, KPIs, and partnership structures.
- Analyze digital maturity: data usage, AI adoption, content strategy, CRM, visitor persona development.
- Assess community engagement, inclusion practices, and destination stewardship approaches.

B. Organizational Assessment

- Review MCTB's current governance structure (nonprofit / DMO model).
- Evaluate staffing capacity, role alignment, and organizational workflows.
- Examine funding model: county and state grants, memberships, sponsorships, co-op programs, and earned revenue.
- Analyze stakeholder relationships: municipalities, arts/culture organizations, hotels, BIDs, farms, attractions, chambers.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Conduct at least 6–8 stakeholder interviews, including:

- MCTB leadership and staff
- Board and Advisory Council members
- County leadership
- Municipal/BID partners
- Tourism and arts leaders
- Hospitality and attraction partners

Optional: Conduct 1-2 focus groups.

D. Roadmap & Strategic Plan Development

Deliver a clear, actionable Strategic Plan that includes:

- Vision, mission, values update
 - Strategic priorities (3–5 major pillars)
 - Governance & staffing recommendations
 - Funding diversification strategy
 - Earned revenue opportunities
 - Co-op marketing & partnership strategy
 - Visitor data and analytics strategy
 - Recommended target industry sectors to further develop the tourism sector
 - Identify industries to be included in the Morris County economic cluster
 - Brand and digital marketing modernization roadmap
 - KPI dashboard for ongoing evaluation
 - Talent & leadership development recommendations
 - Timeline for implementation (short-, mid-, long-term)
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5. Deliverables

A. Kick-Off Meeting & Project Work Plan

- Confirm work plan, timeline, interview schedule, and data-sharing structure.

B. Midpoint Interim Report

- Early findings
- Benchmarking summary

- Preliminary opportunities and gaps

C. Comprehensive Final Strategic Plan Report

A full strategic plan including:

- Organizational & Governance Analysis
- Benchmarking Results Matrix
- Funding Diversification Plan
- Digital Readiness & Marketing Modernization Plan
- Community & Stakeholder Engagement Framework
- Co-Op Marketing & Partnership Model
- Brand Narrative & Storytelling Recommendations
- Visitor Data Strategy & KPI Dashboard Template

D. Executive Summary Slide Deck

Consultants will provide a final presentation to:

- MCTB & Chamber of Commerce Board
- County Commissioners
- Stakeholder partners

E. Optional Add-Ons (price separately)

- Implementation of the Strategic Plan
 - Public-facing summary document
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6. Project Budget

The total project budget shall **not exceed \$45,000**, inclusive of all fees, research, travel, and administrative costs. All deliverables become property of the Morris County Tourism Bureau and may be reused or repurposed as needed. Printing or media production costs, if applicable, should be itemized separately as recommendations.

7. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must include:

- Cover letter summarizing understanding of the project and proposed approach
- Strategic planning and benchmarking methodology
- Approach to stakeholder engagement
- Timeline & project management plan
- Consultant team bios and resumes
- Prior DMO or tourism strategic planning experience
- Three (3) client references from comparable projects
- Budget proposal & cost breakdown

8. General Notes

- The RFP may be obtained at the Morris County Tourism Bureau website at <https://morristourism.org/rfps-studies/>
- At a minimum, vendors must submit all materials requested in accordance with the specifications of this RFP to be considered complete and responsive.
- The MCTB will award contracts to the responsible and eligible vendor(s) whose proposal is responsive to the Request for Proposals (RFP) and is deemed by the MCTB to be the most highly advantageous and in the best interest of the MCTB.
- Lowest bidder is a consideration, but not the determining factor. The evaluation will identify those proposals which offer the best combination of expertise and value.
- Vendors may apply to any or all of the services requested, indicating whether they would be partnering with other companies or professionals and/or utilizing subcontractors.
- Proposals received after time stipulated will not be accepted and any request for an extension will not be granted on an individual basis. However, the MCTB and Review Committee may decide to extend the submission deadline for all vendors if it is determined that the timeframe is inadequate; an addendum to the RFP may be released and will be posted on the MCTB website.
- The MCTB prefers that the project be led by one (1) prime contractor providing a single point of contact and coordination with the other vendors.
- Please submit one (1) proposal if you are bidding on multiple items, and include information regarding subcontractors preferred co-collaboration with another vendor.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Proven experience in tourism strategic planning and DMO benchmarking
- Experience with data-driven strategic planning
- Understanding of digital marketing, AI, and data intelligence
- Quality and clarity of methodology
- Team qualifications
- Creativity and feasibility of recommendations
- Cost-effectiveness and value

10. Submission Instructions

Submit one (1) digital PDF via email:

Ms. Samantha Rutledge

Director, Strategic Partnerships
Morris County Economic Development Alliance /
Morris County Tourism Bureau
6 Court Street
Morristown, NJ 07960
Email: samantha@morriscountyalliance.org
CC: opportunity@morriscountyalliance.org

Proposals must be received by **Friday, February 13, 2026**. Questions may be submitted by email no later than **Friday, January 30, 2026**. Responses released no later than **Friday, February 6, 2026**. A summary of all Q&A will be shared with interested bidders upon request. Submit all questions to samantha@morriscountyalliance.org and please cc opportunity@morriscountyalliance.org

11. Project Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFP Issued	Friday, January 16, 2026
Deadline for Questions	Friday, January 30, 2026
Responses to Questions (no later than)	Friday, February 6, 2026
Proposal Submission Deadline	Friday, February 13, 2026
Virtual Interviews of Finalists	Week of February 16 & 23, 2026
Award Announcement (anticipated)	Friday, February 27, 2026
Project Completion (anticipated)	End of April 2026 (2-month project)

12. Terms & Conditions

- MCTB reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.
 - This RFP does not commit MCTB to award a contract or pay costs associated with response preparation.
 - All submitted materials become property of MCTB.
 - The selected consultant must be available to begin immediately upon award and complete work in accordance with proposed schedule.
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About the Morris County Economic Development Alliance (d/b/a Morris County Tourism Bureau)

The Morris County Tourism Bureau (MCTB) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization with the interchangeable DBA of "The Morris County Economic Development Alliance" (MCEDA). The organization is an affiliated division of the 501c6 Morris County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) and Morris County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC). The organization holds the distinction of being the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Morris County.

The organization's mission is to serve as the primary destination marketing organization for Morris County NJ, that positively affects the economy by promoting the area's exceptional historic, cultural, dining, and recreational attractions. The Morris County Tourism Bureau also provides services to residents, business travelers and tourists.