

Innovate Alabama Request for Proposals Release Date: August 28, 2023

Innovate Alabama is seeking proposals with cost estimates to develop an Outdoor Recreation website and comprehensive marketing campaign by a qualified Alabama-based professional communications agency or vendor (Firm). Firms expressing interest should be fully qualified and capable of providing the RFP results outlined below.

ABOUT INNOVATE ALABAMA

Innovate Alabama is Alabama's first statewide public-private partnership focused on entrepreneurship, technology and innovation with a mission to help innovators grow roots in Alabama. With founding CEO Cynthia Crutchfield leading the charge, Innovate Alabama aims to foster an environment through forward-thinking policies and programs where entrepreneurship can thrive in every corner of our state.

Innovate Alabama's predecessor, the Alabama Innovation Commission, developed a comprehensive report to serve as a blueprint for its mission. This report contains key recommendations and strategies that Innovate Alabama has adopted, such as increasing access to capital, attracting and retaining talent and positioning Alabama's outdoor recreation and lifestyle assets as economic drivers in an innovative ecosystem.

From inventing windshield wipers, to becoming a leader in aerospace and biomedical research, to revolutionizing how essential items get delivered to doorsteps, Alabama has a rich tradition of innovation. At Innovate Alabama, we are working to foster Alabama's collaborative, vibrant innovation ecosystem where today's entrepreneurs and innovators are offered a desirable cost of living, a business-friendly climate and a supportive environment to grow, work, learn and play.

THE COUNCIL ON OUTDOOR RECREATION

In 2021, Innovate Alabama joined forces with Alabama native Condoleezza Rice and Stanford University's Hoover Institution to conduct extensive research to help us grow smart. A primary takeaway from this research was the opportunity to leverage Alabama's natural resources to help innovators grow roots here, leading the Innovate Alabama board of directors to create a Council on Outdoor Recreation in August 2022.

Charged with developing a strategic path forward aligned with three main objectives — expand Alabama's outdoor recreation industry, enhance the state's attractiveness for a skilled workforce and yield substantial returns for both rural and urban communities — the council and its advisory roundtable developed 13 key recommendations to support Innovate Alabama's mission:

Key Recommendations

1. Build a comprehensive, regularly updated inventory of all Alabama outdoor recreation assets.
2. Create a website that's a central hub for all outdoor recreation assets in Alabama.
3. Develop a comprehensive, long-term outdoor recreation asset branding, marketing and advertising plan for the state of Alabama.

4. Engage with state government agencies to improve and streamline the process for obtaining existing outdoor recreation funds.
5. Establish a permanent Council on Outdoor Recreation within Innovate Alabama.
6. Hire staff and establish programs within Innovate Alabama that are focused on and dedicated to promoting outdoor recreation.
7. Identify ways to cooperate with other states, cities and organizations to boost awareness about our Alabama outdoor recreation assets.
8. Organize and host an annual Alabama outdoor recreation summit/conference.
9. Develop a comprehensive, competitive analysis of what other similar states are doing well and a plan for replicating or improving upon their successes in utilizing outdoor recreation assets to retain and attract talent.
10. Leverage existing studies to guide planning and implementation efforts.
11. Bolster economic development recruitment efforts by ensuring that economic development partners have marketing assets to use in touting Alabama's outdoor recreation resources in their pitches to both in-state and out-of-state businesses and entrepreneurs.
12. Identify large, high-profile, high-impact development opportunities and actively recruit developers for those specific projects, possibly offering tailored economic incentives or tax credits.
13. Advocate for long-term, dedicated, sustainable funding in-state budgets for maintaining, enhancing and coordinating the promotion of outdoor recreation assets.

With these recommendations recently identified, Innovate Alabama is currently expanding its scope and focus on Outdoor Recreation. The Innovate Alabama Outdoor Recreation leadership team will serve as the organization's liaison to the Council on Outdoor Recreation. The Council on Outdoor Recreation will continue to serve as the official outdoor recreation advisors. The advisory roundtable, which brought diverse and comprehensive perspectives together to help steer the council's recommendations, was officially disbanded following the release of the above recommendations.

All information concerning this RFP, including any related information that is subsequently disclosed by Innovate Alabama during the bid and proposal process, is Innovate Alabama's confidential information. You may not disclose such information, or use it for any purpose other than responding to the RFP without Innovate Alabama's prior written consent, except as required by law. Submission of a proposal constitutes acceptance of these terms.

Except for the confidentiality obligations set forth above, this RFP is a solicitation of bids only and neither the issuance of this RFP nor the submission of a responsive proposal shall be binding on Innovate Alabama. Innovate Alabama reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals or to cancel this RFP for any reason or no reason. No binding agreement shall exist with respect to the provision of services unless and until a definitive agreement has been agreed and executed by both Innovate Alabama and the selected service provider(s). Innovate Alabama will not be liable under any circumstances for any expenses incurred by any bidder in connection with the RFP proposal submission or selection process.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Scope Outcomes

Execution of this RFP's scope of responsibilities should accomplish the following:

- **Website Outcomes:**
 - Position the Innovate Alabama Outdoor Recreation's nested website as a central hub housing all of Alabama's outdoor recreation assets for those interested in learning how to explore the outdoors and associated industries in Alabama.
 - Effectively highlight Alabama's unique outdoor recreation assets and future outdoor recreation-related programs.
 - Align the outdoor recreation website with Innovate Alabama's overall strategic communications strategy, brand messaging and supporting marketing assets (including its new Innovate Alabama website currently in development).
 - Leverage Innovate Alabama's outdoor recreation content to keep users engaged on the website through interactive design, social integration and user-experience elements.
- **Marketing Campaign Outcomes:**
 - Develop and execute a comprehensive, long-term outdoor recreation marketing plan and supporting assets for the state of Alabama that align with the outdoor recreation council's recommendations.
 - Ensure the outdoor recreation marketing campaign takes into account branding, messaging and advertising considerations that support the overall strategic communications strategy of Innovate Alabama.

Scope Responsibilities

Innovate Alabama is seeking a Firm to assist with the development, design, implementation and launch of an Outdoor Recreation website and marketing campaign with the following scope roles and responsibilities:

- **Website Scope:**
 - General Requirements:
 - Build-out on WordPress site or similar product that takes in account user experience, social engagement, data integration and ease of navigation through a user-centric design.
 - Increase Innovate Alabama brand visibility and online awareness.
 - Ensure that the design, coding and layout of website is professional, visually appealing and aligns with Innovate Alabama's broad and more specific Outdoor Recreation's brand identities (site architecture, content strategy, interactive/visual elements, etc.).
 - Copywrite and copyedit with Innovate Alabama's brand voice with oversight from the public relations agency of record.
 - Integrate a visually appealing and user-friendly asset map to showcase Alabama's outdoor recreation assets.

- In addition to highlighting ongoing outdoor recreation-related programs, include an interactive resource directory that shares guides, safety tips, regulations and other relevant resources that help visitors plan their outdoor activities.
 - Demonstrate the art of the possible with considerations, such as database integration, interactive mapping, social media integration, etc.
 - Provide training for authorized personnel on how to update and manage website content using the content management system (CMS).
 - Offer ongoing technical support and maintenance services to address any issues or updates.
 - Integrate search engine optimization (SEO).
 - Incorporate user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) best practices.
 - Coordinate brand-aligned video/photography for site use.
 - Support ongoing day-to-day website maintenance and management (examples include updating copy, adding visual elements, creating new pages, etc.).
 - Technical Requirements:
 - Cross-browser/cross-device compatibility.
 - Fast loading times and optimized performance.
 - Secure and reliable hosting environment.
 - Latest version of WordPress site.
 - Compatible with current and supported versions of Chrome, Safari and Firefox.
 - Responsive on all devices, including desktop, tablet and mobile.
 - Connects to Google Analytics and Google Search Console accounts.
 - Plug-in abilities.
 - Below are similar organizations in structure and mission that you may use as a reference point related to our expectations with this new website:
 - [Recreation Roundtable](#)
 - [Visit North Carolina – Outdoor NC](#)
 - [Travel Oregon](#)
 - [Visit Utah](#)
- **Marketing Campaign Scope:**
 - General Requirements:
 - Build out a detailed one-year marketing strategy outlining goals, target audiences, messaging, positioning and campaign timeline with deadlines.
 - Produce campaign priority visuals, including banners, templates, animations and promotional materials to utilize through events, the outdoor recreation website, Innovate Alabama social media channels, outdoor recreation partners’ marketing platforms and more.
 - Create compelling foundational messaging and brand-aligned templates to share content following marketing plan launch, including talking points, ad copy, social media posts, marketing merchandise and outdoor recreation partners’ supporting materials.

- Design campaign-specific branding elements that align and complement existing Innovate Alabama brand guidelines.
 - Develop an integrated marketing campaign content calendar outlining the distribution of materials across various platforms and channels.
 - Lend expertise to build Innovate Alabama's internal capacity.
 - Develop advertising strategies across various platforms, including but not limited to Google Ads, social media, radio, broadcast television, online television platforms and print media (examples may be marketing touchpoints placed at strategic intersections in major cities and near prominent venues around the state).
 - Demonstrate the art of the possible with considerations for owned, shared and paid opportunities across the state and country.
 - Implement tracking tools (Google Analytics, etc.) to measure campaign performance.
 - Report regularly on key performance indicators and insights.
 - Execute marketing campaign with an initial period ending December 31, 2024.
- Technical Requirements:
 - Mailchimp is the preferred email marketing platform.
- **Budget and Project Timeline:**
 - Transparency on any foreseen hard costs, including disclosure of any third-party contractors the Firm plans to bring in for specific services (i.e., coding, database integration, interactive mapping, copywriting, photography, etc.).
 - The new website must go through at least two revision periods, a soft launch and an official launch by March 2024. The marketing campaign will be executed after the website's official launch in March 2024.
- **Copywriting and Brand Alignment:**
 - In addition to the marketing plan implementation and design and technical aspects of the website, understanding Innovate Alabama's voice, tone and messaging as it relates to outdoor recreation is critical to achieving the RFP goals. Therefore, Innovate Alabama requests that the Firm have a dedicated copywriter. Please provide the copywriter's experience and sample of similar copywriting (no more than 3 samples of work).
 - Innovate Alabama can share current brand guidelines that the selected Firm will integrate across website design and marketing campaign strategy.
- **Project Management Processes:**
 - Firm's point of contact(s) for the following must be clarified at onset of project for the following: project manager, designer, copywriter, copy editor and marketing lead.
 - Firm must be willing to manage the project through the project management system, Monday.com.

Proposal Section Requirements

Innovate Alabama requests that all potential Firms submit a proposal (no more than an eight-page PDF – no front and back) outlining the following:

- **Executive Summary:** provide a high-level synopsis of the Firm's RFP response.
- **Innovation & Outdoor Recreation Experience:** in-depth understanding of Innovate Alabama and the state's outdoor recreation assets, including how they are being leveraged as an economic development tool.
- **Website Experience and Vision:** please include the following 1) experience with similar website development and hyperlinked samples of work (no more than 3 samples of work); 2) the firm's proposed approach and vision with its website development.
- **Marketing Campaign Experience and Vision:** please include the following: 1) the firm's overall process in developing and executing a marketing campaign; 2) the firm's team capacity to successfully plan and execute the campaign; 3) a recommended timeline and strategic approach to building out and implementing the campaign; and 4) hyperlinked samples of work (no more than 3 samples of work) showcasing your team's ability to deliver on the campaign's initial goals and objectives.
- **Copywriting Experience:** the selected in-house copywriter's sample of work, demonstrating that this professional can capture Innovate Alabama's voice (no more than 3 samples of work).
- **Project Timeline:** a detailed timeline, including a proposed structure for achieving website and marketing plan goals, outcomes and deliverables identified in the RFP (all RFP deliverables must be accomplished by the end of 2024).
- **Firm Availability:** confirmation of availability for website buildout, marketing plan launch and implementation.
- **Account Team:** individuals who will work on the project and their designated roles and responsibilities.
- **Project Management:** approach to project management, including how qualified the Firm is with the project management system, Monday.com.
- **Website Client and Marketing Campaign References:** please provide at least two relevant client references with project relevance listed and reference contact information.
- **Fees:** fee structure, including a detailed and comprehensive fee breakdown by projected hours, deliverable estimates, hard costs, anticipated upfront costs, use of outside contractors and cost estimates (if any) and estimates for ongoing maintenance/management.
- **Sizzle Reel:** Agencies invited to present during the final round will be asked to present up to a 60-second sizzle reel showcasing the art of possible with how to market Alabama's outdoor recreation assets to encourage innovators to grow roots here. The video submission will remain proprietary to the agency and will not be shared externally.

ADDITIONAL RFP CLARIFICATION

Questions about the RFP should be submitted through [this SurveyMonkey link](#) by Thursday, August 31, at 5:00 p.m. CDT. Innovate Alabama will review the questions and disseminate a comprehensive FAQ sheet in response by Tuesday, September 5. **Proposals with URLs linking to additional response materials outside of those requested in the RFP will be automatically disqualified.**

Innovate Alabama is an EEO and encourages WBE and underrepresented companies to apply.

RFP TIMELINE & DELIVERY

- **FAQs:** please submit any FAQs by Thursday, August 31, at 5:00 p.m. CDT through the following [SurveyMonkey link](#).
- **Proposal Submission Guidelines:** all proposals must be sent as a PDF attachment with a clear subject line stating “FIRM NAME – Innovate Alabama Outdoor Recreation RFP Response” to info@innovatealabama.org. Please detail the proposal section requirements listed above. All submissions should be received no later than 5:00 p.m. CDT on Wednesday, September 13.
- **Selection and Project Timeline:**
 - RFP release date – August 28, 2023
 - Deadline to submit RFP questions – August 31, 2023
 - Formal FAQ sheet distributed – September 5, 2023
 - RFP response deadline – 5:00 p.m. CDT, September 13, 2023
 - Invitation to top Firms for presentation to Innovate Alabama – September 19, 2023
 - Finalists’ presentations – Week of September 25, 2023
 - Vendor selection – Week of October 2, 2023
 - Desired website and marketing campaign launch goal date – March 1, 2024

EVALUATION

We anticipate a two-week period for reviews. During this timeframe, we may request additional information and interview a selection of Firms who submit proposals. The target for award is early October, with work beginning shortly thereafter. The timeframe for this work is October 2023 through December 31, 2024. Innovate Alabama reserves the exclusive right to reject any or all proposals submitted, subject only to Innovate Alabama’s sole discretion. Innovate Alabama assumes no obligation, no responsibility and no liability for costs incurred by the responding firms prior to issuance of a contract. Innovate Alabama will negotiate all contract terms upon selection.