



June 24, 2026

Dear Qualified Marketing & Advertising Agencies:

On behalf of the Ontario County Four Seasons Local Development Corporation—operating as Visit Finger Lakes—we are pleased to release this Request for Proposal for Marketing and Advertising Services. Visit Finger Lakes is the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Ontario County, New York, and the region’s definitive voice for one of the most celebrated travel destinations in the Northeast.

We are seeking a strategic agency partner, not simply a vendor, to help us sharpen our brand positioning, lead media buying and creative production, and drive measurable growth in overnight visitation to Ontario County. The Finger Lakes is an internationally recognized destination celebrated for its glacially carved lakes, award-winning wineries, outdoor recreation, and vibrant small cities and towns. Our FY27 media and agency investment of approximately \$343,000 represents a renewed organizational commitment to strategic, data-informed marketing, and we intend to deploy it with precision and purpose.

The right partner will bring deep destination marketing expertise, independent thinking, and a collaborative spirit to a relationship built on transparency and shared goals. We value vision over conformity: we encourage proposers to challenge our assumptions, identify gaps, and bring their best strategic thinking to this engagement.

Please review this document carefully. Proposals are due no later than July 24, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST and must be submitted electronically to Alicia M. Richie at alicia@visitfingerlakes.com. Questions may be submitted through July 1, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST. We look forward to reviewing your proposal and exploring what a partnership with Visit Finger Lakes could accomplish together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alicia M. Richie".

Alicia M. Richie
President & CEO

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

Visit Finger Lakes is the official destination marketing organization for Ontario County, New York, a premier four-season travel destination encompassing five glacially carved lakes, internationally recognized wine country, vibrant main streets, award-winning culinary experiences, and a rich tapestry of outdoor recreation and cultural heritage. Ontario County's tourism industry generates over \$377.7 million in annual visitor spending, and the organization is funded through a 3% county-wide occupancy tax.

Through this RFP, Visit Finger Lakes seeks a qualified marketing and advertising agency to serve as its Agency of Record beginning September 1, 2026, with an anticipated engagement running through December 2027 and the potential for contract renewal.

THE OPPORTUNITY

After a multi-year hiatus, Visit Finger Lakes is reinvesting in a dedicated media buying and advertising program for FY27 (October 1, 2026 - September 30, 2027). This represents a significant strategic reset, one that requires an agency partner with the expertise, creativity, and destination marketing fluency to help the organization claim its position as the definitive voice of Ontario County in an increasingly competitive regional landscape.

Key challenges and opportunities include:

- Differentiating Visit Finger Lakes and Ontario County in a fragmented regional landscape where multiple organizations share the "Finger Lakes" brand identity.
- Establishing Ontario County as the preferred overnight base for travelers exploring the broader Finger Lakes and western New York region.
- Driving measurable increases in overnight visitation, particularly during shoulder seasons, to diversify from the summer/fall demand concentration.
- Amplifying authentic destination assets—outdoor recreation, award-winning wine, arts and culture, and festivals—to inspire travel across target markets.
- Aligning marketing strategy with a forthcoming organizational strategic plan to ensure every initiative is grounded in agreed-upon goals.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected agency will lead an integrated set of marketing functions in coordination with Visit Finger Lakes' in-house team, including:

- Overall brand strategy and destination positioning
- Integrated leisure campaign development (meetings, sports, and group travel are secondary priorities)
- Media planning, buying, optimization, and performance reporting across traditional and digital channels
- Digital and programmatic advertising
- Analytics, reporting, and data-driven insights
- Email and newsletter marketing strategy
- Content creation leveraging the existing Bynder asset library, with limited new asset development
- Graphic design support for collateral and print advertising
- Light website support via Granicus/Simpleview CMS
- Influencer identification and strategy
- Cooperative advertising program management (50/50 partner match, capped at \$50,000 in partner investment)
- Collaboration with PR and other marketing-related partners

BUDGET SUMMARY

The following allocations represent estimated FY27 investments, subject to adjustment based on the findings of the concurrent strategic planning process:

- Media Buying: \$200,000 (inclusive of cooperative advertising program)
- Agency Fees & Services: \$108,000 (account management, media planning, creative, analytics, email marketing)
- Visual Asset Development: \$35,000

Respondents are encouraged to propose scalable service models that can flex with these parameters. Final budget allocations will be confirmed in advance and in collaboration with the selected agency prior to contract execution.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Overall company experience and demonstrated results - 35 points
- Scope of work understanding and creative approach - 25 points
- Qualifications of personnel - 25 points
- Budget approach and cost effectiveness - 15 points

KEY DATES

- RFP Released: June 24, 2026
- Proposer Inquiry Deadline: July 1, 2026, 5:00 p.m. EST
- Proposals Due: July 24, 2026, 5:00 p.m. EST
- Interviews / Presentations: August 4-6, 2026
- Selection Notification: August 18, 2026
- Contract Start: September 1, 2026

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted electronically in searchable PDF format no later than **July 24, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST** to:

To: Alicia M. Richie - alicia@visitfingerlakes.com

CC: accounting@visitfingerlakes.com

Subject: RESPONSE TO RFP: Marketing & Advertising Services

Questions regarding this RFP must be submitted via email by July 1, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST. Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to amend the schedule at its sole discretion.



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL Marketing & Advertising Services

The Ontario County Four Seasons Local Development Corp (Finger Lakes Visitors Connection known in this context as Visit Finger Lakes) invites agencies to submit proposals to serve as its Marketing and Advertising Agency of Record to lead media buying, creative production, and long-term marketing strategy to efficiently grow awareness, drive visitation, and strengthen its position as the definitive destination marketing authority for Ontario County, NY and its many main streets, cities, and villages.

As the region's official destination marketing organization, Visit Finger Lakes operates in an increasingly competitive and fragmented landscape, one where multiple organizations share the Finger Lakes name and travelers have more choices than ever. To cut through that noise and deliver measurable results, the organization requires a dedicated agency partner capable of developing and executing a sophisticated, data-informed media strategy that reaches the right audiences at the right moments.

The selected agency will serve as a true strategic partner, not simply a vendor, responsible for media planning and buying, creative coordination, cooperative advertising, analytics, and ongoing optimization across traditional and digital channels. This relationship will be built on transparency, shared goals, and a deep understanding of the destination marketing landscape. The selected agency will bring independent thinking, creative leadership, and a deep understanding of destination marketing dynamics. The right firm will help Visit Finger Lakes sharpen our positioning and drive measurable increases in overnight visitation.

This document constitutes a Request for Proposal ("RFP"), in a competitive format, from qualified firms. This request is an offer by Visit Finger Lakes to underwrite, in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP, the services proposed by the successful firm(s), by contract.

The respondents ("Proposers") to this RFP shall provide a proposal, in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth herein, to provide all or part of services to Visit Finger Lakes as described in the Scope of Work. Proposers are encouraged to go beyond what is outlined here. Propose alternatives, identify gaps, and challenge our assumptions where your expertise warrants it. Visit Finger Lakes values vision over conformity to a brief.

It is not a requirement that all services be delivered in-house. Agencies with strong, established partnerships in areas such as media buying, creative, PR, or strategy are welcome and may be preferred over firms stretching their own staff to cover every function.

About Visit Finger Lakes

Visit Finger Lakes is the official destination management organization (DMO) for Ontario County, one of 14-counties making up the Finger Lakes region of New York State. It's an internationally recognized wine destination featuring glacially carved lakes, outdoor recreation, farm-fresh culinary experiences, rich heritage, arts & cultural vibrancy, festivals, and seasonal highlights.

The organization works in partnership with local hospitality businesses, community leaders, municipal partners, attractions, and state and federal agencies to promote the Finger Lakes as a four-season travel destination and drive economic impact while enhancing quality of life for residents and supporting sustainable destination development. Visit Finger Lakes supports travel trade, media, and

consumer audiences through destination marketing, itinerary development, press trip coordination, and travel trade education programs.

Visit Finger Lakes is a non-profit DMO funded through a portion of a 3% county-wide occupancy tax for dwellings with three or more rentable rooms.

- **Total annual budget for FY27:** \$1,495,209 with roughly \$200,000 allocated to media buying and paid media, plus an additional \$10,000 for public relations; asset development and agency fees/retainers not included in these numbers.
- **Mission:** To curate, distinguish, and develop Ontario County's destination brand to inspire travel that creates economic vitality for our stakeholders and communities, and provides quality of life benefits for our residents.

The Destination

Ontario County is one of the 14 counties that make up the comprehensive Finger Lakes region as designated by the State of New York and promoted as such. Encompassing five of the 11 glacially carved lakes (Canandaigua, Seneca, Honeoye, Canadice, and Hemlock; more than any other county), rolling vineyards and farmland, cascading waterfalls, miles of outdoor recreation, and vibrant small cities and towns, Ontario County's tourism industry drives over \$377.7 million in visitor spending, according to Tourism Economics 2024 Economic Impact Report.

While a four-season destination, summer and fall drive the most demand and revenue for the near 1,700 rooms county-wide. Anchored by its prime location and accessibility by car and air service, Ontario County sits to the south of Rochester, east of Buffalo and west of Syracuse.

- Boston, M.A., or Detroit, M.I.: 7 hours
- New York City, N.Y., Philadelphia, P.A., or Washington, D.C.: 6 hours
- Montreal and Hartford, C.T., or Newark, N.J.: 5 hours
- Harrisburg, P.A., or Cleveland, O.H.: 4 hours
- Toronto, O.N., or Albany, N.Y.: 3.5 hours
- Hamilton, O.N., or Cooperstown, N.Y.: 3 hours
- Buffalo, N.Y., or Niagara Falls, N.Y.: 1.5 hours
- Corning, N.Y., or Syracuse, N.Y.: 1.25 hours

Key Destination Assets

- Waterfront & Outdoor Recreation
 - **Canandaigua Lake:** One of the crown jewels of the region, offering boating, swimming, and lakeside dining.
 - **Seneca Lake:** Geneva's prime location on Seneca Lake makes it a hub for trophy-fishing, including the annual National Lake Trout Derby, and recreational boating.
 - **Bristol Mountain:** A major year-round destination featuring downhill & nordic skiing in the winter and aerial adventure courses and hiking during the warmer months.
 - **Community Parks & Preserves:** Expansive natural areas like Onanda Park, Harriet Hollister Recreation Area, Seneca Lake State Park, Kashong Conversation Area, High Tor Wildlife Management Area, and the Canandaigua Vista Nature Preserve provide excellent hiking, kayaking, and camping opportunities.
- Arts & Culture
 - **CMAC (Constellation Brands-Marvin Sands Performing Arts Center):** A premier outdoor amphitheater on the grounds of Finger Lakes Community College that hosts major musical acts and cultural events.
 - **Historic Sites:** Sonnenberg Gardens & Mansion State Historic Park features stunning Victorian-era architecture and themed gardens, while the Ganondagan State Historic Site honors centuries of Seneca and Haudenosaunee history.

- **Local Performing Arts:** Venues like the historic Smith Opera House in Geneva, Fort Hill in Canandaigua, and the Bristol Valley Theater offer robust seasonal entertainment.
- Culinary & Craft Beverage
 - **Wine Enthusiast's 2025 Wine Star Award American Wine Region of the Year:** Awarded to the Finger Lakes, honoring two centuries of innovation, sustainability, and cool-climate excellence. Plus, a collection of advanced and master sommeliers in downtown Geneva.
 - **Canandaigua Lake Wine Trail:** A collection of premier wineries and vineyards offering tastings and stunning scenic views.
 - **New York Kitchen:** Located in Canandaigua, this facility provides culinary education, hands-on cooking classes, and a tasting room highlighting regional foods and wines.
 - **Craft Beverage Scene:** A thriving ecosystem of local breweries, hard cideries, and distilleries spanning the county.
- Premier Accommodations & Attractions
 - **Luxury Resorts:** Properties like The Lake House on Canandaigua, Hotel Canandaigua, and Geneva on the Lake drive significant high-end lodging and dining.
 - **Family Fun:** Attractions like Roseland Waterpark, Roseland Mini Golf, and Roseland Wake Park in Canandaigua serve as popular summer hotspots.
- Highly Regarded Festivals
 - **Naples Grape Festival:** held last weekend in September during the peak harvest season, this beloved festival celebrates the "Grape Pie Capital of the World." Visitors flock to the village for the famous World's Greatest Grape Pie Contest, live regional music, regional artisans, and the Brahm Moore Beverage Garden featuring dozens of Finger Lakes wineries and cideries.
 - **Tap & Craft Festival:** Taking place in November at Hotel Canandaigua, this autumn event lets attendees sample dozens of pours from craft breweries, cideries, and distilleries across the Finger Lakes while enjoying local artisan vendors and live music.
 - **Christkindl Market:** Held in mid-November at the Granger Homestead and Carriage Museum in Canandaigua, featuring over 150 regional artisans selling unique holiday gifts inside decorated, heated tents, plus authentic German food, "Gideon's Grog," local wine and beer, visit with Santa, and walk through the traditional Festival of Trees.
 - **Clifton Springs Festival of Lights:** An iconic early-December event that illuminates downtown Clifton Springs. The family-friendly festival features dazzling light displays, horse-drawn wagon rides, live entertainment, and visits from Santa Claus.
 - **The Fire & Ice Festival in Canandaigua:** a highly popular, award-winning annual winter festival held in the historic downtown district during mid-February. The two-day event draws crowds to the Finger Lakes region by bringing together the contrasting elements of freezing ice and sizzling fire.
 - **Maple Weekends:** these family-friendly festivals take place during the last two weekends of March, featuring sugarhouse tours, tree-tapping demos, and maple product samplings.
 - **Geneva Music Festival:** Spans mid-May to mid-June, blends world-class classical, jazz, and chamber music with regional Finger Lakes wineries and local food markets.
 - **National Lake Trout Derby:** Held Memorial Day weekend on Seneca Lake in Geneva, this multi-day fishing tournament and community festival awards major cash prizes.
 - **Freedom Festival at Bristol Hills:** Taking place in mid-June at the Bristol Hills Historical Society, this event features Revolutionary War reenactments, pioneer crafts, vintage games, and lectures honoring the nation's earliest days.
 - **Downtown Canandaigua Art & Music Festival:** This annual July event features a juried fine arts and crafts show with over 150 vendors. Set along South Main Street, it draws huge crowds with diverse live musical performances across multiple stages, alongside food trucks and outdoor dining.

- **Indigenous Music & Arts Festival:** Hosted at the Ganondagan State Historic Site, this July event celebrates Haudenosaunee and Indigenous culture. It offers traditional music, dance performances, storytelling, an Indigenous art market, and authentic food.
- **Geneva's Glorious Garlic Festival:** Held at the Geneva Lakefront, this recurring weekend event celebrates all things garlic. Attendees can enjoy cooking demonstrations by local chefs, wine and beer tastings, and various food stalls.
- **Phelps Sauerkraut Weekend:** Held in late July, this community tradition features carnival rides, road races, live entertainment, and food vendors.
- **Pageant of Steam:** hosted by the New York Steam Engine Association, this early August festival celebrates historic Americana with antique tractors, daily equipment parades, steam traction engines, plowing demonstrations, and live music.

Strategic Priorities

The agency partner will be expected to support the following core positioning objectives:

1. **Plan-Driven Prioritization.** The completion of Visit Finger Lakes' forthcoming strategic plan (separate RFP) will serve as the foundation for this priority area. Upon adoption, organizational resources, partnerships, and programming will be realigned to reflect the plan's defined goals, ensuring every initiative is tied to a clear, agreed-upon direction.
2. **Brand Definition, Clarity & Digital Presence.** Define and defend Visit Finger Lakes' distinct position in a crowded regional landscape reducing confusion from competing "Finger Lakes" entities, while improving digital performance to more effectively reach, inspire, and convert travelers.
3. **Ontario County as Regional Home Base.** Establish Ontario County as the smart, innovative choice for overnight travelers exploring the Finger Lakes Region and western New York.
4. **Authentic Experiences.** Drive the narrative toward Ontario County's authentic assets: outdoor recreation, award-winning wineries, gardens, historic downtowns and main streets, craft beverage trails, arts and culture, festivals, and agriculture.

Scope of Work

The selected agency, in coordination with Visit Finger Lakes' in-house team, will lead the following:

- Overall brand strategy and destination positioning.
- Integrated campaign development (priority is leisure; meetings/sports/group/weddings secondary).
- Media planning, buying, optimization, and performance reporting.
- Digital and programmatic advertising.
- Analytics, reporting, and data-driven insights.
- Email/newsletter marketing strategy.
- Content creation from Visit Finger Lakes' existing asset library (Bynder); additional funds are allocated to capture limited new content.
- Graphic design for collateral and print ads support as needed.
- Light website support as needed using Granicus/Simpleview CMS
 - support could be in the form of graphics, visuals to help style a key page.
 - some additional copywriting, proofing, and optimizing blogs for SEO; beyond the scope of work for Granicus/Simpleview SEO contract.
- Collaboration with other marketing related partners, i.e. PR.
- Invoices must be generated early in the month, generally by the 7-9th day.
- Assistance in strategy of photo and video shoots, if needed.
- Additional support for Annual Report, County presentations.
- Work with and recommend influencers.
- Identify placement opportunities beyond social media boosts and google placement.
- Be aware of industry trends we may leverage.

- Follow copyright and intellectual property protocols with suggestions on SEM, SEO, and AI optimization.

Expectations & Desired Qualifications

The selected agency is expected to:

- Provide a dedicated account lead with strong communication skills and DMO fluency.
- Bring genuine tourism expertise-ideally including experience with small-market DMOs.
- Ground all recommendations in data, traveler insights, and regional market knowledge.
- Collaborate closely with Visit Finger Lakes staff and coordinate effectively with external partners.
- Deliver clear, timely reporting and fully transparent monthly billing.
- Negotiate aggressively on Visit Finger Lakes' behalf with media vendors and partners.
- Monitor regional events, travel trends, and I Love New York opportunities proactively.
- Maintain flexibility as organizational priorities evolve.
- Minimum five years of demonstrated experience in areas relevant to Visit Finger Lakes' mission and strategic priorities. Strong familiarity with Western New York and the Finger Lakes markets preferred.

Budget

Visit Finger Lakes' annual media buying budget is new; having been reallocated since 2020 into other priorities. For FY27 (October 1, 2026 - September 30, 2027), the following allocations are estimated, subject to organizational priorities and the findings of the strategic planning process currently underway.

- **Media Buying | \$200,000** *(estimated)*
 - This allocation covers paid media placements across traditional and non-traditional channels. Included within this budget is a 50/50 cooperative advertising program, capped at a Visit Finger Lakes partner investment of \$50,000, which is designed to amplify regional partner participation in campaign efforts.
- **Agency Fees & Services | \$108,000** *(estimated)*
 - This allocation is intended to cover the full scope of agency support, including account management, media planning, creative development, analytics and reporting, and email marketing support.
- **Visual Asset Development | \$35,000** *(estimated)*
 - These funds support the creation of new visual content, supplementing assets produced through the organization's existing CrowdRiff Creators program and contracted content writing efforts.
- **Important Budget Considerations**
 - The county budget contract will be reviewed annually, informed by the formula and findings of the strategic plan currently in development. Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to adjust budget allocations in advance and in collaboration with the selected agency, and prospective partners should expect that final figures may shift prior to contract execution.

Respondents are encouraged to propose scalable service models that can flex with these parameters.

Proposal Requirements

Submissions should include company portfolio samples or links to relevant work. To be considered responsive, proposals must include the following:

- Executive Summary
- Firm profile and ownership structure; New York State strongly supports women owned businesses
- Tourism and DMO experience (minimum 5 years)

- Case studies with measurable outcomes
- Strategic and creative approach for Visit Finger Lakes
- Media philosophy
- Website support capabilities
- Team Structure and named account lead
- Pricing model (retainer, media, and any variable fees)
 - Cost by project phase or task
 - Estimated hours for each task
 - Personnel job titles and billing rates beyond contracted hours
 - Any subcontractor costs and associated billing rates
 - Any anticipated travel or administrative expenses
- Suggested meeting format; inclusive of travel fees/time management
- Client references (minimum three)
- Conflict of interest disclosure

Schedule

Event	Date	EST
RFP Released to Proposers	June 24, 2026	5:00 P.M.
Proposer Inquiry Period Ends	July 1, 2026	5:00 P.M.
Final Responses to Proposer Inquiries	July 7, 2026	5:00 P.M.
Proposals Due	July 24, 2026	5:00 P.M.
Interviews/Presentations (if applicable)	August 4-6, 2026	TBD
Estimated Notification of Selection	August 18, 2026	EOD
Contract Start Date	September 1, 2026	

Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to amend this schedule at its sole discretion through a published addendum. The selected Proposer(s) will enter into a contract for services with Visit Finger Lakes. The anticipated duration of the project is approximately through December 2027, by which time contract could be renewed/extended to coincide with the county funding contract, if granted.

Instructions to Proposers

Proposers are advised to review all sections of this RFP carefully and follow the instructions completely.

1. Alternative methodologies are welcome; however, proposals that materially alter the intent of the RFP may be deemed non-responsive.
2. All costs associated with proposal preparation are the responsibility of the Proposer.
3. Proposals shall remain valid for a minimum of 120 days following submission.
4. Pricing submitted shall be considered firm and fixed unless otherwise noted.
5. Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.
6. All materials submitted in response to this RFP become the property of Visit Finger Lakes.
7. The selected firm may be required to provide proof of insurance and execute a formal contract agreement.

Evaluation Criteria

Responsive proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

	Points
<p>OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF COMPANY & DEMONSTRATED RESULTS An assessment of the history of your company, your experience as it relates to the requirements within this RFP, evidence of past performance, quality and relevance of past work, references, and related items.</p>	35
<p>SCOPE OF WORK Proposal demonstrates understanding of the project and articulates a well thought out and creative process with a workplan, timeline, and additional</p>	25

considerations to achieve the desired results.	
QUALIFICATIONS OF PERSONNEL An assessment of the qualifications and experience of your managerial team, staff, subcontractors, and related items.	25
BUDGET APPROACH/COST EFFECTIVENESS Effective and efficient delivery of quality services is demonstrated in relation to the budget allocation. The allocation is reasonable and appropriate.	15
TOTAL	100

NOTE: Designated Visit Finger Lakes staff or selected advisors will evaluate the written proposals. Visit Finger Lakes may at any time during the evaluation process seek clarification from Proposers regarding any information contained within their proposal. Final scores for each respondent will reflect a consensus of the evaluations. Any attempt by a Proposer to contact a member of Visit Finger Lakes's staff or selected advisors outside the RFP process, in an attempt to gain knowledge or an advantage, may result in disqualification of Proposer.

Proposal Submission

Responses to this RFP must be submitted electronically no later than July 24, 2026; 5 p.m. est. Electronic proposals should be sent to:

TO: Alicia M. Richie, alicia@visitfingerlakes.com

CC: accounting@visitfingerlakes.com

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO RFP: Strategic Planning Services

Submission requirements:

- Searchable PDF format
- One complete proposal
- One redacted proposal, if applicable

Questions regarding this RFP should be submitted via email no later than July 1, 2026; 5 p.m. Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to terminate this solicitation at any time prior to entering into an agreement and reserves the right to reject any or all proposals that do not comply with the terms of this RFP.