



June 24, 2026

Dear Interested Parties/Proposers,

On behalf of Visit Finger Lakes, the official destination marketing organization for Ontario County, New York, I am pleased to release this Request for Proposal (RFP) for Strategic Planning Services. This document invites qualified consultants and firms to submit proposals to partner with us in shaping the organization's direction for the next three to five years.

The Finger Lakes region stands at an exciting inflection point. Tourism continues to grow, visitor expectations are evolving, and the opportunity to strengthen our impact across leisure travel (domestic and international), meetings, group tours, sports tourism, and destination stewardship has never been greater. A clear, evidence-based, and community-informed strategic plan is essential to ensuring that Visit Finger Lakes remains a high-performing, adaptive, and mission-driven organization.

We are seeking a consultant or firm with demonstrated expertise in strategic planning for destination marketing organizations or comparable entities, strong facilitation capabilities, and the ability to engage a diverse range of stakeholders including our board and staff as well as county government, industry partners, and community members. The selected firm will lead a collaborative, inclusive process resulting in a comprehensive strategic plan that is actionable, measurable, and aligned with regional tourism goals.

This RFP outlines our project overview, background, scope of work, qualifications, submission requirements, evaluation criteria, and timeline. Proposals are due no later than Friday, July 24, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST and should be submitted electronically to alicia@visitfingerlakes.com with a copy to accounting@visitfingerlakes.com. Questions must be submitted by July 1, 2026.

Visit Finger Lakes is committed to a fair, transparent, and competitive selection process. We look forward to reviewing proposals from firms that share our enthusiasm for the Finger Lakes and Ontario County and our commitment to strategic excellence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alicia M. Richie", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Alicia M. Richie
President & CEO

Executive Summary

Visit Finger Lakes, the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Ontario County, New York, operating under the Ontario County Four Seasons Local Development Corp, is issuing this Request for Proposal to engage a qualified strategic planning consultant or firm to guide the development of a comprehensive, multi-year strategic plan.

This initiative reflects the organization's commitment to forward-looking, data-informed leadership and its dedication to maximizing the economic and community benefits of tourism in Ontario County within the Finger Lakes region.

About Visit Finger Lakes

Recognized for its scenic lakes, award-winning wineries, craft beverage industry, culinary experiences, outdoor recreation, historical roots, and vibrant communities, the Finger Lakes region is one of New York State's premier tourism destinations. Visit Finger Lakes serves as the county's primary destination marketing and management body, working collaboratively with tourism businesses, community leaders, municipal partners, and regional stakeholders to drive economic impact and support sustainable destination development.

Purpose of This Engagement

Visit Finger Lakes is launching a strategic planning process to establish a clear organizational roadmap for the next 3-5 years. The resulting plan will:

- Align internal operations and staffing with long-term priorities and regional tourism goals.
- Engage a broad cross-section of stakeholders, from board members and staff to county government, industry partners, and community members.
- Revisit and refine the organization's vision, mission, and core values.
- Establish measurable strategic priorities and a practical implementation framework.
- Incorporate current tourism trends, destination stewardship principles, sustainability, accessibility, and workforce considerations.
- Produce a clear, compelling, and actionable final plan to be presented to the Visit Finger Lakes Board of Directors and the Ontario County Board of Supervisors.

Scope of Work At-A-Glance

The selected consultant or firm will lead a structured, collaborative engagement encompassing six core workstreams:

- **Project Design & Management:** Develop a detailed work plan, milestone schedule, and regular check-ins with Visit Finger Lakes leadership.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Design and facilitate inclusive engagement activities such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, and workshops with a diverse stakeholder universe.
- **Vision, Mission & Values Development:** Review and, where appropriate, revise core organizational identity statements through facilitated consensus-building.
- **Strategic Priorities & Goal Setting:** Define and prioritize 3-5 year goals with measurable objectives aligned to the organization's mission and regional opportunity.
- **Destination Stewardship & Industry Trends:** Integrate tourism industry data, benchmarking, sustainability principles, and competitive analysis into the planning process.
- **Implementation Framework & Final Plan:** Deliver a polished, visually engaging strategic plan document with actionable timelines, performance indicators, and resource guidance.

Budget & Timeline

The maximum budget for this engagement is \$30,000, with payment structured in two installments. The anticipated project duration is approximately 150 days from contract execution. Key dates are summarized below:

- **RFP Released:** June 24, 2026
- **Proposer Questions Due:** July 1, 2026
- **Proposals Due:** July 24, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST
- **Interviews (if applicable):** August 4-6, 2026
- **Selection Notification:** August 18, 2026
- **Contract Start:** September 1, 2026

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be scored on a 100-point scale across four criteria:

- Overall Experience & Demonstrated Results: **35 points**
- Scope of Work-Approach & Work Plan: **25 points**
- Qualifications of Personnel: **25 points**
- Budget Approach / Cost Effectiveness: **15 points**

How to Respond

Submit proposals in searchable PDF format via email by July 24, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. EST to:

- **To:** alicia@visitfingerlakes.com
- **CC:** accounting@visitfingerlakes.com
- **Subject line:** RESPONSE TO RFP: Strategic Planning Services

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



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Strategic Planning Services

The Ontario County Four Seasons Local Development Corp (Finger Lakes Visitors Connection known in this context as Visit Finger Lakes) seeks a qualified consultant or firm to lead the development of a multi-year strategic plan that will guide the organization's priorities, partnerships, and resource allocation. The goal is to establish a clear, forward-looking roadmap that strengthens Visit Finger Lakes' impact, aligns stakeholders, and positions the organization for sustainable success in a rapidly evolving tourism landscape.

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.

Project Overview

Visit Finger Lakes is launching a strategic planning initiative to define the organization's direction for the next 3-5 years. This process will result in a comprehensive strategic plan that aligns internal operations, stakeholder expectations, and county tourism goals.

The selected consultant or firm will lead a collaborative process that includes stakeholder engagement, as well as Visit Finger Lakes Board of Directors and Ontario County Board of Supervisors and the development of clear strategic priorities, measurable goals, and an actionable implementation framework. This plan will serve as a roadmap to strengthen Visit Finger Lakes' impact, adaptability, and long-term success as the official destination marketing organization for Ontario County and the Finger Lakes region.

Background

Visit Finger Lakes is the official destination management organization 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.

Scope of Work

The selected vendor will be responsible for the following:

- **Project Design and Management**
 - Develop a detailed work plan and timeline in collaboration with Visit Finger Lakes leadership.
 - Identify milestones, key decision points, and stakeholder engagement activities.
 - Facilitate regular check-ins to ensure transparency and momentum throughout the process.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**
 - Engage a broad range of stakeholders including staff, board members, municipal partners, tourism industry stakeholders, community organizations, and residents.
 - Use a mix of engagement tools (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups, workshops) to gather input on perceptions, priorities, and aspirations.
- **Vision, Mission, and Values Development**
 - Review and, if necessary, revise Visit Finger Lakes' vision, mission, and core values to ensure they reflect the organization's purpose, direction, and commitment to the communities it serves.
 - Facilitate consensus-building around organizational identity and long-term aspirations.
- **Strategic Priorities and Goal Setting**
 - Facilitate collaborative workshops to identify key strategic priorities for the organization over the next 3-5 years.
 - Define measurable goals and objectives aligned with Visit Finger Lakes' mission and regional tourism opportunities.
- **Destination Stewardship and Industry Trends**
 - Incorporate current tourism industry trends, destination stewardship principles, workforce considerations, accessibility, sustainability, and visitor experience best practices into the planning process.
 - Identify opportunities to strengthen regional and state collaboration, tourism product development, and destination competitiveness.
- **Implementation Framework**
 - Develop a practical and flexible implementation framework that includes timelines, responsibilities, performance indicators, and resource needs.
 - Ensure alignment between the strategic plan and operational planning, staffing, budgeting, and partnerships.
- **Final Plan Development and Presentation**
 - Produce a clear, actionable, and visually engaging final strategic plan document.
 - Present the plan to the Visit Finger Lakes Board of Directors and staff, as well as the Ontario County Board of Supervisors and provide recommendations for operationalizing and monitoring progress.

Qualifications

To be considered for this engagement, vendors must demonstrate a strong track record of experience and expertise relevant to the scope of this project. Minimum qualifications include:

- Strategic Planning Expertise
 - Demonstrated experience leading strategic planning processes for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), tourism agencies, nonprofits, or similarly structured organizations.
- Tourism Industry Knowledge
 - Strong understanding of the tourism and hospitality sector, including trends, challenges, and opportunities relevant to regional and destination marketing.
- Stakeholder Engagement Experience
 - Proven ability to design and facilitate inclusive engagement processes with diverse stakeholders including staff, board members, tourism partners, municipal leaders, and community members.
- Facilitation and Consensus Building
 - Excellent facilitation skills to guide collaborative discussions and build consensus around vision, mission, values, and priorities.
- Data-Driven and Insight-Oriented
 - Ability to incorporate relevant data, research, benchmarking, and tourism analytics into the strategic planning process to ensure informed, evidence-based decision-making.
- Communication and Reporting Skills
 - Strong written and visual communication skills, with a proven ability to deliver clear, compelling, and actionable strategic plan documents.
- Project Management and Timeliness
 - Demonstrated success managing complex projects on time and within budget, with clear communication and milestone tracking throughout the engagement.

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 150 days from contract execution to completion.

Budget

The proposed budget for this project shall not exceed \$30,000 over the Contract Term. The payment terms are Net 30 days from the date Visit Finger Lakes receives an error-free invoice with all necessary and complete supporting documentation. Payment will be made in two installments; one billed at

contract signing for ½ of the contract budget and the remainder to bill at the delivery of an approved plan.

Proposers shall provide a detailed fee structure outlining all costs necessary to complete the proposed scope of work, including:

- Total, maximum price to accomplish the scope items incorporated in the proposal.
- Cost by project phase or task
- Estimated hours for each task
- Personnel schedule including job titles and billing rates
- Any subcontractor costs and associated billing rates
- Any anticipated travel or administrative expenses

Visit Finger Lakes reserves the right to adjust the scope of services and associated budget as necessary. In addition to showing how you will meet the requirements outlined above, Proposers should also provide information regarding the following:

- Research & Analytics: Provide an overview of how you determine success. What are the analytic tools or services that you use, and what type of information will you be reporting back to Visit Finger Lakes as it relates to meeting our objectives?
- Travel and Administration: The Proposer should estimate any travel costs expected to incur during contract period.

Proposal Requirements

To be considered responsive, proposals must include the following:

- Technical Proposal Elements
 - Description of the proposed approach and methodology for delivering the Scope of Work.
 - Proposed project timeline including major milestones and deliverables.
 - Identification of the primary point of contact.
 - Qualifications and experience of the firm, including relevant project examples and references.
 - Identification of the proposed project team and their respective roles and qualifications.
 - Description of stakeholder engagement methods and facilitation approach.
 - Description of performance measurement and implementation support approach.

Budget Proposal

Include a detailed budget and fee schedule for all proposed services.

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 considerations to achieve the desired results.</p>	25
<p>QUALIFICATIONS OF PERSONNEL An assessment of the qualifications and experience of your managerial team, staff, subcontractors, and related items.</p>	25
<p>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.</p>	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.