REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

RFP 2023 - 05

Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Business Plan for Tribal Tourism Operations

Deadline to submit proposals: July 14, 2023, no later than 3:00pm local time.

Overview

Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA), a federally recognized Tribal government, is seeking competitive proposals from qualified vendors to develop a business plan for its tourism operations.

Since the 1990s, STA has created a variety of enterprises with the goals of generating unrestricted revenue to support Tribal government operations and providing employment opportunities for Tribal Citizens. Sitka Tribal Tours is the largest of these enterprises. It offers a variety of local excursions, primarily for cruise ship visitors between the months of May and October, that highlight the indigenous culture of the Tlingit people. Offerings include coach and walking tours, traditional Tlingit dance performances, and a gift shop featuring locally made products and art.

The most recent business plan for Sitka Tribal Tours was completed in 1997. Over the past 25 years, the program has experienced changes in management, products, and training, a complete shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, a very limited tourism season in 2021, and a local boom in cruise ship visitors in 2022. Demand for Tribal Tours has increased, and the business is experiencing challenges in hiring and scaling up. In the wake of an extremely busy 2022 season and sold-out tours for 2023, STA is eager to develop a business plan to make Tribal Tours self-sustaining and profitable going forward.
Vendors interested in bidding are encouraged to register by emailing STA Controller Nadia Riley, nadia.riley@sitkatribe-nsn.gov. Questions about this RFP and expectations for the scope of work will be addressed in writing to all registered bidders until June 29, 2023. Questions must be emailed to STA Controller Nadia Riley, nadia.riley@sitkatribe-nsn.gov, with the subject line RFP 2023-05. STA will not accept questions by phone or text and will not respond to questions directed to any party other than the Controller.

Services to commence by October 16, 2023, with all work completed by April 19, 2024.

**Proposal Requirements**

Proposals shall include the following required elements; vendors are advised to complete the checklist on page 12 of this RFP. Vendors shall respond with sufficient detail to facilitate the evaluation of all factors listed in the evaluation criteria. Failure to provide required items may result in proposals being considered non-responsive.

1. **Vendor Information**: Business name and DBA (if applicable), number of years in business, physical address, email address, phone number and website.
2. **Current Contracts**: List of vendor’s current contracts and those completed within the past three years, including project title or subject, client names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for a contact person.
3. **Subcontractor information**: Business name and DBA (if applicable), number of years in business, physical address, email address, phone number and website for any proposed subcontractor(s).
4. **Project personnel**: Name, title and qualifications of key project personnel assigned to the project, including the designated project manager.
5. **Project plan**: Narrative describing vendor’s approach to the project in detail, including proposed workflow and timeline, research plan, proposed plan for interaction with STA staff, and presence on the ground in Sitka.
6. **Sample of relevant work (recommended)**: Provide at least one sample of a business plan developed by vendor; either as a pdf or web link.
7. References: Contact information for at least three professional references that can speak to vendor’s ability to complete the scope of work successfully, including name, business name, address, phone number and email address.

8. Documentation to support eligibility for Native preference, if relevant. For individuals, partnerships, and for-profit corporations, submit Tribal ID or CIB for majority owner. For Tribally-controlled entities, submit articles of incorporation or bylaws documenting ownership or control by a Tribal entity, or requirement for board majority of Alaska Native and American Indian people.

9. Fee proposal using the bid form provided, including a summary of all costs to deliver the scope of services for the project, including but not limited to consultant fees, travel costs and incidental expenses. All cost information shall be included on the bid form rather than in the body of the proposal.

10. Certification of eligibility to receive federal funds: Statement attesting that the vendor and any subcontractors, if relevant, have not been disbarred, suspended, or otherwise determined to be ineligible to receive federal funds. STA is required to confirm that vendor and any subcontractors have not been disbarred, suspended or otherwise determined to be ineligible to receive federal funds on SAM.gov.

11. Signature: the signature of the vendor’s authorized representative who can certify compliance with all proposal requirements.

**Background Information**

**Tourism in Sitka, Alaska**

Sitka is an island community of approximately 8,400 permanent residents in the Tongass National Forest of Southeast Alaska. There is no connection to the mainland. All access to Sitka is by air or water. The main pillars of the local economy are healthcare, commercial fishing, and tourism.

Sitka is a major seasonal destination for cruise ships. Typically, the cruise season runs from early May through late September. Over the past 25 years, cruise ship tourism has fluctuated significantly, especially over the past five years. In 2018, the community saw 158,000
cruise ship visitors, which increased to slightly under 200,000 in 2019. The industry shut down entirely due to the pandemic in 2020. Cruise ships at reduced capacity visited Sitka from July through September in 2021. In 2022, the community had a record 383,000 visitors. As many as 500,000 cruise passengers are expected in 2023. The rapid increase in cruise ship tourism has created opportunities and challenges for the community, especially with respect to shore excursion capacity. Hiring and housing a seasonal workforce has emerged as a major constraint to meeting the increased demand for shore excursions.

Sitka is also a growing destination for independent travelers. Outstanding scenery and wildlife, charter fishing, cultural events and institutions, and local history are all draws for visitors arriving by commercial and private jets and private yachts. The Sitka Municipal Airport is served by Alaska Airlines jets daily year-round, with more frequent flights and nonstop service to and from Seattle in the summer. Delta Airlines offers daily jet service to and from Seattle from late May through early September. Alaska Seaplanes offers scheduled small plane service between Sitka and other communities in the region, including Juneau, year-round. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the community is probably at capacity to provide overnight accommodations for independent travelers between May and August. Shoulder season tourism in March, April, September and October appears to be increasing. The weather in Sitka between November and February discourages visitors.

The Tlingit people have lived in Sitka since time immemorial. U.S. Park Service rangers at Sitka National Historical Park interpret the Native and colonial history of place and people for visitors, and the park offers demonstrations of traditional arts by local Native artists. Sitka Tribe of Alaska offers the primary opportunity for visitors to learn about Sitka from its original people.

**Sitka Tribe of Alaska and Sitka Tribal Tours**

Sitka Tribe of Alaska is the federally recognized Tribal government for approximately 4,500 Tribal citizens with present or ancestral roots in Sitka, Alaska. STA is an open enrollment Tribe with a foundation in Tlingit culture. Approximately 24 percent of Sitka residents – slightly more than 2000 individuals – identified as Alaska Native or American Indian, alone or in combination with other races in the 2020 census; a majority are enrolled Tribal citizens of STA.
Sitka Tribal Tours began operations in May of 1994. Its mission is to introduce visitors to the local Native culture using a positive and reinvigorated approach to tradition, resulting in a tour program with an authentic perspective on the Tlingit culture and providing economic opportunities for the Native community. Growing and perpetuating Tlingit values and culture, Lingít Yoo X’atángí (language) and Haa Kusteeyí (our way of life) are at the root of the program. Tribal Tours seeks to perpetuate the Tlingit culture through tours that provide a rich and educational view of Sitka’s Indigenous history, and to highlight traditional and modern Tlingit culture and lifestyles.

Originally, Tribal Tours offered a one-hour sightseeing tour that was marketed toward independent travelers at the cruise ship pier. Soon, Tribal Tours introduced 2.5- hour and 3.5-hour tours that included stops at the Sitka National Historical Park, the Naa Kahídi Native Dance Show, Sheldon Jackson Museum, and Alaska Raptor Center. These tours were marketed as shore excursions to passengers in advance.

In 2013, Tribal Tours underwent the first of several management changes. It began conducting operations as step-on guides for Ketchikan-based Alaska Coach Tours. Alaska Coach Tours became the recipient of the Tribal Tours narrative. STA’s mission of tribal employment, perpetuation of culture and authenticity was diluted under this structure. Product quality declined, resulting in a loss in revenue and loss in credibility with the travel and tourism industry.

At the end of the 2019 summer season, STA decided to resume direct management of Tribal Tours. A Tourism Manager was hired to prepare for the 2020 season. STA invested in maintenance of vehicles, marketing to cruise lines, hiring local tour guides and commercial drivers, and creating a cultural training program. Unfortunately, none of the investments in capacity could be implemented in 2020 due to the total shutdown of the cruise ship season as a result of COVID-19. Tribal Tours operated to some extent during the abbreviated 2021 cruise ship season. STA used federal pandemic aid to cover operating losses and invested in capacity for the future.

In 2022, Tribal Tours brought in expert trainers for Tlingit language, history, and culture. The Tribe purchased used vehicles in good condition. Hiring tour guides, sales agents and
drivers was a major constraint, but tour quality and financial performance improved, and demand for tour products increased.

At the beginning of the 2023 tour season, Tribal Tours is operating 11 small vehicles – 10 buses with capacity ranging from 12 to 37, and a 12-passenger van. Offerings include a 2.5 hour and a 3.5-hour bus tour around Sitka, including a 30 to 40 minute dance show at the Sheet’ká Kwáan Naa Kahidí (Community House). The Tribe also offers walking tours, and operates a gift shop at the Community House featuring locally made products and arts. Tribal Tours works to integrate Lingít Yoo X’atángi (language) and Tlingit culture into all its offerings through training involving Tribal Elders and culture-bearers. Tribal Tours is unique in the local market in its focus on Indigenous culture. It is the only entity offering a Native dance show in Sitka.

Sitka Tribe also hosts an annual cultural and heritage tourism conference in Sitka in early spring.

Sitka Tribe is in its second year of a comprehensive rebranding project, including new visual identities for the Tribal government and its programs, a new website, and enhanced social media. This project is scheduled for completion in December 2023.

Scope of Work

The scope of work for the business plan includes the following elements:

Task 1: Conduct analysis of existing and projected tourism market in Sitka

- Cruise ship tourism
  - Historical port calls and visitors by year, 2003 - 2023
  - Projected port calls and visitors by year, 2023 – 2028
  - Demographics of Alaska cruise ship visitors by market segment
    - Small ships < 100 passengers
    - Small ship high end market < 1,000 passengers
    - Large ship market
  - Shore excursions
- Major vendors and offerings in 2023
- Estimate of percentage of cruise ship visitors who participated in shore excursions in 2023
- Information on pricing of products offered by other vendors as available in 2023
- Information on number of employees and wages for other vendors in 2023 as available
- Estimate of gap between demand for shore excursions and current capacity in Sitka

- Independent Travelers
  - Describe and discuss trends in the number and demographics of independent travelers to Sitka
  - Data on activities enjoyed by independent travelers
  - Estimates of spending by independent travelers

- Other Travelers
  - Summary of conferences and other professional events that bring visitors to Sitka, such as Southeast Conference, athletic tournaments and state conferences.

**Task 2**: Conduct a detailed analysis of Tribal Tours’ history and current operations, including

- Restatement of mission and core values for Tribal Tours
- Summary data and narrative description of customers in 2022 and 2023
- Summary of products in 2022 and 2023
- Capital inventory
- Discussion of cultural assets and capital
- Human resources, including number of employees, tenure and wage structure for 2023 season
- Description of current business strategy and structure
- Description of current marketing strategy and assets
- Description of current pricing and payment systems
- Analysis and comparison of financial results for 2022 and 2023
• Discussion of industry reputation based on confidential interviews
• SWOT analysis
• Development of five-year goals for revenue, profits and Tribal citizen hiring in collaboration with STA staff

**Task 3:** Conduct an analysis of opportunities for Tribal Tours based on information developed in Task 1 and Task 2, including:

• Restatement of goals with respect to profitability and employment of Tribal citizens
• Market positioning and potential market share with respect to cruise ship passengers
• Growth of existing operations
• Development of new products
• Adjustments to current pricing
• Potential partnerships
• Opportunities to expand offerings into shoulder seasons and winter

**Task 4:** Provide detailed recommendations on opportunities for Tribal Tours to pursue beginning in the 2025 summer season, addressing:

• Specific market segments to target
• Products
• Pricing
• Partners
• Marketing, including avenues and key messaging
• Capital needs
• Human resource needs
• Technology needs
• Training needs
• Schedule
• Projected ROI

**Task 5:** Following completion of Task 4, STA may request that the vendor prepare a detailed marketing plan based on recommendations.
The vendor is expected to use all available public and industry data and may propose interviews and focus groups. STA will provide the chosen vendor with confidential data on its Tribal Tours operations to support its analysis.

Findings from all tasks will be summarized in a written final report, which shall be presented in person to STA staff in Sitka.

**Proposal Submittal**

Proposals shall be submitted electronically by email to STA Controller Nadia Riley, nadia.riley@sitkatribe-nsn.gov, with the subject line RFP 2023-05. Proposals will be accepted until 3:00 pm on July 14, 2023. Proposals received by the deadline will be acknowledged by email. Late proposals will not be accepted.
**Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals shall be evaluated by a committee using the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Max. Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications of the team assigned to the project, including consultants, if any. Subject expertise in Tribal tourism, cultural heritage tourism, Alaska tourism and cruise ship tourism is highly desirable.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor’s experience with similar projects. Previous experience preparing business plans for Alaska Native or American Indian clients engaged in tourism is highly desirable.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor’s understanding of STA’s needs based on its response to the RFP.</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall quality of the vendor’s proposal and plan to complete the scope of work requested in the RFP. Engagement with STA staff and persons with direct experience in tourism in Sitka is highly desirable.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor’s resources to perform scope of services, and ability to complete project in April 2024.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client references</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal/Native preference, available to firms with majority ownership by a STA citizen or citizen of another Alaska Native or Indian Tribe, and Tribally-owned or controlled entities, such as an Alaska Native corporation or Native CDFI.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with vendors, if conducted</td>
<td>10</td>
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The STA Controller or their designee will conduct contract negotiations with the vendor submitting the highest-scored proposal. If STA and the highest-ranked vendor cannot agree on contract terms, including fees, the Controller or their designee may negotiate with other vendors who submitted proposals, in order of their scores. STA reserves the right to negotiate the scope of work with the selected vendor based on available funds.

STA reserves the right to reject all proposals and waive any and all informalities, and the right to disregard all nonconforming or conditional proposals or counter proposals. STA
reserves the right to reject any proposal if investigation of the proposer fails to satisfy STA that it is properly qualified to carry out the obligations and to complete the work contemplated by the contract documents. All proposals will be rejected if there is reason to believe that collusion exists among the proposers. The signature on the face of the proposal certifies that the proposal is made without prior understanding, agreement, or connection with any corporation, firm, or person also submitting a proposal for the same services and is in all respects fair and without collusion or fraud. Proposer’s signatory agrees to abide by all conditions of this proposal and certifies that he/she/they is authorized to sign the proposal for the proposer.
Proposal Checklist

☐ Vendor information: Business name and DBA (if applicable), number of years in business, physical address, email address, phone number and website.

☐ Current contracts: List of vendor’s current contracts and those completed within the past three years, including client names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for a contact person.

☐ Subcontractor information: Business name and DBA (if applicable), number of years in business, physical address, email address, phone number and website.

☐ Project personnel: Name, title, qualifications, and role of key personnel assigned to project, including the designated project manager.

☐ Project plan: Narrative describing vendor’s approach to the project in detail, including proposed workflow and timeline, research plan, proposed plan for interaction with STA staff, and presence on the ground in Sitka.

☐ Sample of relevant work (optional but recommended): Provide at least one sample of a business plan developed by vendor; either as a pdf or web link.

☐ References: Contact information for at least three professional references, including name, business name, address, phone number and email address.

☐ Documentation of eligibility for Native preference, if applicable. For individuals, partnerships, and for-profit corporations, submit Tribal ID or CIB for majority owner. For Tribally-controlled entities, submit articles of incorporation or bylaws documenting ownership or control by a Tribal entity, or requirement for board majority of Alaska Native and American Indian people.

☐ Firms’ qualifications and experience performing similar engagement working with Tribal organizations, include a list of current and/or former tribes for which the firm has provided similar services.

☐ Fee proposal using the separate bid form provided. Do not include cost information in proposal narrative.

☐ Certification of eligibility to receive federal funds: Statement attesting that the vendor and any subcontractors have not been disbarred, suspended, or otherwise determined to be ineligible to receive federal funds.

☐ Signature: The signature of the vendor’s authorized company representative
Tentative Schedule for Selection Process

The following is a tentative schedule provided as a courtesy to potential vendors. The actual schedule may vary from the one provided above without notice to potential proposers. Any changes made to the proposal due date will be made in the form of an addendum provided to all registered vendors who have received RFP documents.

- RFP posted: June 13, 2023
- Deadline to submit questions: June 29, 2023
- Deadline to submit proposals: July 14, 2023, 3:00pm
- Interviews with firms if needed: August TBD
- Tribal Council award: September 20, 2023
- Selected firm notified: September 21, 2023
- Contract finalized: October 11, 2023
- Project kickoff: Week of October 16, 2023
- Project completion: April 19, 2023
### Task # | Description | Time) | Unit Price | Subtotal
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
1 | Conduct analysis of existing and projected tourism market in Sitka | | $ | -
2 | Conduct detailed analysis of Tribal Tours’ history and current operations | | | |
3 | Conduct an analysis of opportunities for Tribal Tours | | | |
4 | Provide detailed recommendations on opportunities for Tribal Tours beginning in 2025 | | | |
5 | At STA option: Prepare a detailed marketing plan based on recommendations | | | |

**Total Price:** $ -

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**Vendor:**

**Address:**

**Number:**

**Email:**

**Authorized Rep. Name:**

**Title:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

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Bids must be accompanied by proposals and received by Sitka Tribe of Alaska by xx, 2023, 3:00 PM Alaska time to be considered responsive. Late proposals and bids will not be accepted. STA reserves the right to negotiate the scope of work outlined in the RFP based on available funding.