

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

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*Explore St. Louis  
Destination Website &  
Digital Experience Platform  
Development*

explore **st.louis**



March 25, 2026

Dear Prospective Partner,

Explore St. Louis invites qualified digital agencies to submit proposals for the design and development of a next-generation website and digital ecosystem for the St. Louis region.

As the official destination marketing organization for St. Louis City & County, Explore St. Louis promotes the region as a premier destination for leisure travel, meetings and conventions, sports tourism, and major events. Our organization collaborates closely with tourism partners, cultural institutions, hospitality businesses, and civic leaders to strengthen the visitor economy and enhance the global perception of St. Louis.

Travel planning behavior continues to evolve rapidly as visitors increasingly rely on mobile-first experiences, AI-powered search platforms, and personalized digital content. Meeting planners and event organizers expect digital tools that support destination evaluation, venue research, and planning logistics.

To meet these expectations, Explore St. Louis is undertaking a strategic digital transformation initiative that will create a future-ready digital ecosystem capable of inspiring visitation, supporting meetings and conventions sales, and delivering measurable value to tourism partners across the region.

We look forward to reviewing your proposal and exploring how your team can help bring this vision to life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Dean".

Brad Dean  
*President & CEO*  
Explore St. Louis

## ABOUT EXPLORE ST. LOUIS

Explore St. Louis is the official destination organization responsible for promoting St. Louis City & County as a premier destination for leisure travel, meetings, conventions, and major events. The organization works in partnership with hospitality businesses, civic leaders, cultural institutions, and regional stakeholders to attract visitors, drive economic impact, and elevate the visibility of St. Louis as a dynamic and welcoming destination.

Through integrated marketing, communications, sales, and partnership initiatives, Explore St. Louis promotes the region's diverse experiences including iconic landmarks, vibrant neighborhoods, arts and cultural assets, sports and entertainment offerings, culinary scene, and outdoor recreation opportunities. These efforts support the growth of the visitor economy while strengthening the region's reputation as a place to visit, meet, and host world-class events.

Explore St. Louis also promotes and supports the America's Center Convention Complex, a cornerstone asset for attracting meetings, conventions, and large-scale events that generate significant economic impact for the region. This includes The Dome at America's Center, a premier venue for major sporting events, concerts, and large public gatherings that play an important role in positioning St. Louis as a competitive destination for national and international events.

The Explore St. Louis website serves as the organization's primary digital platform for destination storytelling, trip planning, partner visibility, meetings and conventions promotion, and event discovery. The new website will play a critical role in helping visitors explore the destination, plan their experiences, and connect with the region's hospitality community while also supporting the organization's broader marketing, communications, and economic development objectives.

## ROLE OF THE DIGITAL PLATFORM

Travelers increasingly rely on digital platforms to research, evaluate, and plan travel experiences.

Key trends shaping the visitor journey include:

- Mobile-first travel planning
- AI-powered search and discovery
- Personalized digital experiences
- Integrated trip planning tools
- Growing competition among destinations

At the same time, meeting planners expect digital resources that help them evaluate destinations, venues, and logistical support.

To remain competitive in an increasingly digital and experience-driven travel marketplace, Explore St. Louis must develop a modern digital platform that inspires visitation, supports meeting and convention sales, informs event attendees, provides resources for potential film production in the region, and delivers measurable value to tourism partners. The new Explore St. Louis website will serve as the organization's

primary digital platform for destination storytelling, trip planning, meetings and conventions promotion, event discovery, and partner visibility.

The platform should guide visitors seamlessly from inspiration to trip planning while showcasing the region's diverse experiences, major conventions, festivals, sporting events, concerts, and cultural attractions. It will also support events hosted at key venues such as America's Center and The Dome while elevating the experiences offered by the region's hospitality and tourism partners.

Built on modern, scalable technology, the platform must be flexible enough to evolve alongside changing traveler expectations, emerging technologies, and the ongoing growth of the St. Louis visitor economy, while delivering a seamless and engaging user experience across devices.

## CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE DIGITAL PLATFORM

- **A source of inspiration for travelers**

Showcasing the unique experiences, neighborhoods, attractions, culinary offerings, arts and culture, outdoor recreation, and iconic landmarks that make St. Louis a compelling destination.

- **A planning tool for visitors**

Providing intuitive trip-planning features including curated itineraries, interactive maps, neighborhood guides, seasonal experiences, and personalized recommendations to help visitors plan their time in the destination.

- **A comprehensive event discovery platform**

Serving as a central hub for discovering festivals, concerts, sporting events, conventions, and community events taking place throughout the region. The platform should support dynamic event listings, filtering by interest or date, and highlight major regional events that drive visitation.

- **A sales and lead-generation platform for meetings and conventions**

Supporting the promotion of the America's Center Convention Complex and regional meeting venues by providing meeting planners with access to venue information, planning resources, and streamlined inquiry tools to connect with the Explore St. Louis sales team.

- **A marketing platform for tourism partners**

Providing visibility for hotels, attractions, restaurants, event organizers, and other tourism businesses through integrated listings, editorial storytelling, and destination content that drives engagement and referrals.

The digital ecosystem must effectively serve multiple audiences, including:

- Leisure travelers seeking inspiration, trip planning tools, and destination information.
- Meeting and convention planners researching venues, services, and resources for hosting conferences, conventions, and business events.
- Event attendees looking for information about upcoming festivals, concerts, sporting events, conventions, and other major happenings at the America's Center Convention Complex and throughout the region.
- Media and content creators researching story ideas, destination assets, and media resources.
- Regional tourism and hospitality partners who rely on the platform to showcase their businesses and connect with potential visitors.
- Residents seeking information about events, festivals, and experiences occurring throughout the region.

The platform must accommodate multiple organizational assets including America's Center and The Dome, and the St. Louis Film Office, with clear recommendations for how these entities should be structured within the overall website architecture.

The platform should be designed with an AI-forward architecture, meaning it supports structured content, semantic search, schema markup, and scalable APIs that enable future integration with AI-driven discovery platforms.

## CURRENT WEBSITE CHALLENGES

Evaluation of the existing website identified several opportunities for improvement:

- Limitations in current information architecture scaling
- Inconsistent mobile experience
- Accessibility gaps
- Technical SEO limitations
- Internal content management challenges
- Scalability

While the site contains strong destination content, discoverability and user experience limitations reduce its effectiveness.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The goals of this initiative include the development of a digital ecosystem that supports destination marketing, sales enablement, event discovery, and partner engagement across the St. Louis visitor economy.

### **1. Inspiration**

Position St. Louis as a compelling and competitive destination by delivering immersive storytelling that inspires travel and exploration.

#### **Objectives:**

- Deliver compelling storytelling that highlights the diverse experiences available across St. Louis and the surrounding region through photo and video assets.
- Showcase cultural assets, neighborhoods, culinary experiences, arts, sports, music, and outdoor recreation.
- Promote major festivals, events, and seasonal experiences that drive visitation.

### **2. Visitor Planning & Event Discovery**

Provide intuitive tools and content that guide visitors from inspiration to trip planning while enabling discovery of events and experiences.

### **Objectives:**

- Guide travelers seamlessly from inspiration to trip planning and visitation through curated itineraries, recommendations, and destination guides.
- Provide comprehensive event listings that allow visitors and residents to discover festivals, concerts, sporting events, conventions, and other major happenings.
- Deliver relevant planning information for event attendees, including venue details, transportation guidance, and nearby experiences.

### **3. Sales Enablement**

Support the business development and sales efforts of Explore St. Louis by providing digital tools that assist meeting planners and industry professionals researching the destination.

### **Objectives:**

- Provide robust digital resources supporting meeting planners researching St. Louis, including venue specifications, capacity charts, planning tools, and downloadable resources.
- Highlight the capabilities of the America's Center Convention Complex, including the America's Center and The Dome, along with additional meeting and event venues throughout the region.
- Support the St. Louis Film Office by promoting the region as a competitive filming destination, showcasing location assets, production resources, permitting guidance, industry contacts, and highlighting available production incentives, including the Missouri Film Tax Credit.

### **4. Partner Visibility & Industry Value**

Deliver measurable value to regional tourism partners and stakeholders through enhanced visibility, storytelling opportunities, and referral traffic.

### **Objectives:**

- Increase visibility and digital exposure for tourism partners including hotels, attractions, restaurants, cultural institutions, and local businesses.
- Integrate partner advertising opportunities seamlessly into the site experience – moving beyond traditional banner ads to more engaging, high-value digital placements that drive partner visibility, engagement, and revenue generation.
- Support the broader hospitality ecosystem by driving qualified visitor traffic and strengthening the regional visitor economy.

### **5. Future-Ready Digital Infrastructure**

Ensure the platform is built on modern, scalable technology capable of evolving with changing visitor expectations and emerging technologies.

### **Objectives:**

- Develop a scalable, secure, and accessible platform built on modern CMS architecture.
- Enable integrations with CRM systems, event platforms, analytics tools, and partner databases.
- Support ongoing content growth, new digital features and future partner integrations and marketing initiatives.

### **6. Data, Personalization & Performance Insights**

Leverage modern data tools and analytics to personalize the visitor experience, measure marketing performance, and support strategic decision-making.

### **Objectives:**

- Provide robust analytics capabilities to measure website performance, user behavior, and marketing effectiveness.
- Enable integration with CRM platforms, marketing automation tools, and partner databases.
- Support personalization and recommendation capabilities based on visitor interests, behavior, and travel intent.
- Deliver dashboards and reporting that provide Explore St. Louis with actionable insights to inform marketing, sales, and partnership strategies.

Agencies should describe their approach to leveraging first-party data, audience segmentation, and user behavior insights to enhance the digital experience and support Explore St. Louis' marketing and sales objectives.

### **Proposals should outline:**

- How the platform will enable the capture and management of first-party visitor data in a privacy-compliant manner.
- Strategies for audience segmentation based on visitor interests, travel intent, and engagement behavior.
- How audience insights can be used to personalize content, recommendations, and trip planning experiences.
- How first-party data can support ongoing marketing optimization, CRM integration, and partner value reporting.

This digital transformation will occur alongside a destination brand evolution initiative that will begin concurrently with the website development project. The website must be designed to seamlessly integrate the evolving brand platform, including narrative positioning, visual identity, and storytelling framework.

The platform should also support modular expansion, allowing Explore St. Louis to introduce new digital tools, integrations, and audience experiences as technology evolves, enabling Explore St. Louis to support multiple audiences, strengthen the destination brand, and expand partner participation opportunities.

## **7. Performance Measurement & Optimization**

### **Objectives:**

- Establish clear performance metrics and KPIs that measure the effectiveness of the digital ecosystem in driving visitation, supporting meeting and convention sales, promoting events, and delivering value to tourism partners.

### **Example KPIs may include:**

- Organic search visibility and AI discovery performance
- Visitor engagement and time on site
- Trip planning tool usage and itinerary creation
- Event discovery and event page engagement
- Meeting planner lead generation
- Partner referral traffic and partner visibility metrics
- Conversion to key actions (RFP submissions, partner referrals, itinerary saves)

- Implement analytics frameworks that track user engagement, visitor journey progression, partner referrals, and lead generation performance.
- Provide dashboards and reporting capabilities that allow Explore St. Louis to evaluate performance across key audiences including leisure travelers, meeting planners, and event attendees.
- Ensure the platform supports ongoing optimization through data-driven insights including A/B testing, content performance analysis, and user behavior tracking.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

The selected agency will provide services including:

- Digital strategy and discovery
- Information architecture development
- UX and UI design
- Website development
- CMS implementation
- Accessibility compliance
- SEO implementation
- Content migration
- Testing and launch support
- Development of a measurement framework and KPI dashboard aligned with Explore St. Louis marketing, sales, and partner value objectives.

## **PROJECT DELIVERABLES**

The selected agency will deliver the following:

- Digital strategy and discovery documentation
- Information architecture and site structure
- UX wireframes and user journey design
- Visual design system and UI components
- CMS implementation and configuration
- Website development and integrations
- Content migration timeline and quality assurance
- SEO implementation and technical optimization
- Accessibility compliance validation. The website must be designed and developed to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility standards to ensure an inclusive and accessible digital experience for all users. Agencies should describe their approach to accessibility compliance throughout the design, development, and testing process, including accessibility validation prior to launch.
- Testing, launch support, and post-launch stabilization
- Provide examples of websites your agency has developed that leverage personalization strategies, including the use of first-party data, audience segmentation, or behavioral insights to deliver tailored digital experiences.

## **WEBSITE FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

The platform must include:

### **Content Management System**

A flexible CMS allowing internal teams to efficiently manage and publish content.

### **Events Platform**

A dynamic calendar showcasing festivals, sporting events, concerts, and cultural experiences.

### **Partner Listings**

Ability to integrate with Simpleview CRM that hosts data for our partner hotels, restaurants, attractions, and all tourism partners.

### **Partner Discovery & Co-Op Participation Framework**

The Explore St. Louis digital ecosystem must support cooperative marketing opportunities for tourism partners while maintaining a strong visitor experience.

Partner participation opportunities may include:

- Contextual partner placements within destination content
- Enhanced partner listings
- Themed partner experiences and guides
- Campaign-based partner visibility
- Seasonal promotional placements
- Curated itinerary inclusion

### **Partner Performance & Referral Tracking**

The platform must support reporting tools allowing Explore St. Louis to measure partner value through:

- Referral traffic tracking
- Engagement metrics for partner listings
- Campaign performance analytics
- Partner visibility reporting

### **Trip Planning Tools**

- Itinerary builder
- Saved experiences
- Travel guides and maps

### **Meetings & Conventions Tools**

- Venue search
- Off-site venue listings
- Convention center information
- Hotel inventory for planners
- RFP submission pathways

## **Technical Requirements**

- Scalable CMS platform
- Secure hosting environment
- API integration capability
- Analytics integration
- Performance optimization
- Security protocols
- Web application firewall
- DDos mitigation
- Multifactor Authentication for administrative access
- Access logging
- Regular OS and application patching
- Vulnerability scanning
- Daily backups with defined retention
- Horizontal and vertical scaling
- 99.9% uptime SLA
- Infrastructure capable of scaling to support emerging AI-driven functionality and integrations

### **Defined security remediation timelines:**

- Critical Patches (CVE 9.0 – 10) – 7 days.
- High Severity Patches (CVE 7.0 – 8.9) – 30 days.
- Medium Severity Patches (4.0 -6.9) – 60 days.
- Low Severity Patches (CVE .1 – 3.9) – Best effort.

## **SEO & AI Discoverability & Future Search Readiness**

The platform must be designed to support strong discoverability across traditional search engines as well as emerging AI-powered discovery platforms. The website architecture should be optimized to ensure that Explore St. Louis content is easily indexed, interpreted, and surfaced within search engines, AI assistants, and conversational discovery tools.

At minimum, the platform must support:

- Comprehensive JSON-LD structured schema markup to enhance search engine understanding of destinations, events, attractions, venues, and experiences.
- Semantic content architecture that supports topic clustering, entity recognition, and contextual relevance.
- AI-ready search optimization, ensuring content is structured and written to perform well in conversational search environments and generative AI interfaces.
- Strong internal linking and content relationships that reinforce topical authority and user journey pathways while still preserving legacy search equity and high value backlinks.
- Zero-click search optimization, utilizing high-confidence data to ensure key destination information surfaces directly within search results and AI-generated answers while still driving high-intent traffic to the site.
- Natural language and conversational query readiness to support how travelers increasingly search using voice assistants and AI-powered tools.
- Structured data frameworks that allow destination content (events, itineraries, neighborhoods, attractions) to be easily interpreted by emerging AI discovery systems.
- High-capacity event architecture engineered for extreme data loads, utilizing advanced indexing to ensure instantaneous filtering and search performance without compromising site speed or core technical health.

- The website should be architected to support integration with emerging AI-driven travel planning tools and itinerary builders.

**Governance & Content Management**

The selected vendor should recommend a governance model including:

- Editorial workflows
- Publishing permissions
- Content standards
- Ongoing site maintenance framework

Agencies should outline recommended post-launch support options including maintenance, security monitoring, platform updates, and ongoing optimization.

**Brand Evolution Alignment**

Explore St. Louis will launch a destination brand evolution initiative concurrently with the website project.

The selected digital partner will collaborate with the brand agency to ensure that:

- The website design system supports the evolving visual identity
- Brand storytelling is integrated across the digital experience
- The digital platform can adapt as the brand evolves.

**PROCUREMENT TIMELINE**

Explore St. Louis anticipates the following schedule for the Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Explore St. Louis reserves the right to modify this timeline at its discretion. Any changes will be communicated to all registered proposers.

MILESTONE	DATE
RFP Release	March 25, 2026
Proposer Inquiry Period	March 25-April 1, 2026
Deadline for Questions	April 1, 2026
Responses to Questions Issued	April 6, 2026
Proposal Submission Deadline	April 15, 2026
Proposal Evaluation Period	April 16-24, 2026
Finalist Interviews/Presentations (if required)	April 28-29, 2026
Agency Selection Notification	May 1, 2026
Contract Finalization	Early May 2026
Anticipated Project Kickoff	Mid-May 2026

## **AGENCY QUESTIONS**

All questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing via email to *Julie Gilbert, CMO* Explore St. Louis at [jgilbert@explorestlouis.com](mailto:jgilbert@explorestlouis.com) by the deadline listed above. Responses will be compiled and distributed to all known prospective proposers to ensure fairness and transparency.

Responses will be shared with all participating vendors.

Any assumptions regarding project scope, integrations, or pricing must be clearly identified within proposals.

## **RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

Explore St. Louis will compile all submitted questions and provide responses in a consolidated Questions & Answers Addendum, which will be distributed to all known proposers. This process ensures that all potential proposers have access to the same information and promotes fairness and transparency throughout the procurement process.

## **AGENCY QUALIFICATIONS & RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

Proposers must demonstrate experience designing and developing websites of comparable scale, complexity, and functionality. Preference will be given to firms with demonstrated experience in destination marketing, travel, tourism, or hospitality-related organizations.

### ***Proposals should include:***

- A brief overview of the firm, including years in operation and core areas of expertise.
- Examples of at least three (3) destination, tourism, or experience-driven websites recently completed that demonstrate relevant capabilities with direct links to each live website including a short description of the project scope, objectives, and the proposer's role in design, development, and implementation.
- Information on the CMS platform and technology stack used in the examples.
- Examples of AI-enabled or personalization features.
- Metrics or measurable outcomes achieved for comparable projects, including improvements in traffic, engagement, conversions, lead generation, partner referrals, or visitor planning behavior.
- Examples of complex integrations (CRM, events, booking, etc.).
- Proposers should provide examples of how their agency has incorporated artificial intelligence into website design, development, or digital experience platforms. Examples may include AI-powered content discovery, personalization, conversational interfaces, recommendation engines, automated content generation, or other relevant innovations.

Additionally, agencies should identify emerging AI applications or capabilities they believe Explore St. Louis should consider implementing as part of its future digital ecosystem, even if those solutions are not currently offered by the proposing agency.

*Agencies may provide recommended project phases and budget ranges based on the scope outlined in this RFP.*

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Proposals must be received by the submission deadline listed above. Late submissions may not be accepted or considered. Please send proposal by 5 p.m. CST April 15, 2026 to **Julie Gilbert, CMO** Explore St. Louis at [jgilbert@explorestlouis.com](mailto:jgilbert@explorestlouis.com).

## EVALUATION & FINALIST INTERVIEWS

Following the proposal submission deadline, Explore St. Louis will conduct an evaluation of all proposals based on the criteria outlined in this RFP. A shortlist of finalist firms may be invited to participate in interviews or presentations to further discuss their approach, experience, and capabilities. Explore St. Louis reserves the right to select a firm based solely on written proposals if it determines interviews are not necessary.

## SELECTION & CONTRACT NEGOTIATION

Upon completion of the evaluation process, Explore St. Louis anticipates notifying the selected firm by the date listed above. Contract negotiations will then begin with the selected firm. If an agreement cannot be reached within a reasonable timeframe, Explore St. Louis reserves the right to enter negotiations with another proposer.

## PROPOSAL OUTLINE

Executive Summary  
Agency Overview  
Agency Qualifications & Relevant Experience  
Strategic Approach  
UX & Design Methodology  
Technical Architecture  
SEO Approach  
Project Team  
Cost Proposal

Proposals should include a detailed implementation timeline that outlines the agency's recommended approach to delivering the project. The timeline should identify key project phases, milestones, review cycles, and estimated durations for each stage of the process.

*The timeline should include, at minimum:*

- Discovery and strategy phase
- Information architecture development
- UX/UI design and prototyping

- Development and CMS configuration
- Content migration and QA
- Accessibility and performance testing
- Launch preparation and deployment
- Post-launch support and optimization

Explore St. Louis reserves the right to request additional information during the evaluation process.

## AGENCY EVALUATION SCORECARD

CRITERIA	WEIGHT
Strategic Approach	15%
Partner Visibility Framework & Revenue Opportunities	15%
UX & Design	15%
Technical Platform	15%
Destination Experience	10%
SEO Expertise	10%
Team	10%
Cost	10%
<i>Total</i>	100%