

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS  
HENRY COUNTY TOURISM REVITALIZATION  
January 23, 2023

The Henry County, Illinois is seeking written statements of qualifications from qualified individuals to act as a nine-month tourism coordinator and identify strategies to reinvigorate tourism in Henry County including updating the Henry County tourism website, developing staffing recommendations along with a suggested and sustainable funding structure for the Henry County Tourism Bureau. The existing municipalities in the County include: Alpha, Andover, Annawan, Atkinson, Bishop Hill, Cambridge, Cleveland, Colona, Galva, Geneseo, Hooppole, Kewanee, Orion, and Woodhull and all would be covered in the effort. The purpose of the Henry County Tourism revitalization effort is to increase non-resident overnight stays in Henry County. This effort was funded through the Research in Illinois to Spur Economic Recovery (RISE) program. The funds are required to be used to help local governments or economic development organizations to create or update economic and tourism related documents to promote economic recovery.

#### BACKGROUND

In 2013, a tourism plan was completed by Hargrove International and Young Strategies which included research and a strategic plan for tourism in Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties. The 2013 plan was prepared for the Henry County Economic Development Partnership (HCEDP) which is a not-for-profit corporation with the mission to coordinate and provide proactive leadership to stimulate local economic growth. The Partnership is made up of county board members, the Farm Bureau, the Henry County Economic Development Director, city mayors, administrators and managers, and representatives of local banks and businesses. The Partnership assists with economic development programs and projects that sustain and encourage the growth of existing businesses while attracting new businesses to Henry County.

The 2013 plan identified tourism assets and suggested strategies to strengthen tourism in the study area. Unfortunately, the strategies suggested in the study were not implemented because the plan did not examine the tourism bureau structure and staffing and provide suggestions for an effective and robust tourism organization based in the County. While a tourism board existed at that time, it did not have the appropriate structure and staff resources to sustain and enhance tourism in the County.

#### PROPOSED PROJECT:

The proposed nine-month tourism project has been funded by the Illinois Department of Commerce Economic Opportunity Research in Illinois to Spur Economic Recovery (RISE) program. Funding has been received to identify strategies to reestablish a tourism in Henry County. Henry County, the municipalities within, and business partners have already demonstrated an ability to implement a similar collaborative effort through the organization of the Henry County Economic Development Partnership and their support for a fulltime economic development director since 2019.

#### SCOPE OF SERVICES

##### **Collection of Relevant Data for Tourism Strategies Document**

The contracted tourism coordinator will meet with all identified tourism and hospitality industry representatives in the County to determine current status and the impacts of the

Covid 19 pandemic. Some of this information has been collected and will be provided to the selected contractor but additional information will be acquired from these meetings. The tourism coordinator will also review the prior tourism plan and prepare updated information related to the tourism assets and service industry and will meet with managers of these assets such as the hotel industry to collect updated data and information. The coordinator will also develop a calendar of all events and festivals and identify ways to package events to increase overnight stays in the County. Bi-State Regional Commission will provide Census data and the use of Implan (already available at Bi-State) as needed for the tourism project to support the coordinator and document preparation.

### **Public Outreach**

The Henry County Economic Development Director will be supporting the selected tourism contractor who will be hired to coordinate the strategies development effort by providing key contacts in the county related to tourism assets, activities, festivals and the tourism service industry including facilitation of meetings as needed with the Henry County Economic Development Partnership. The tourism contractor will then visit and schedule meetings with the tourism industry. Within the first month of being hired the contractor will meet with appropriate County officials and the Henry County Tourism Bureau and the Henry County Economic Partnership to discuss the project. Throughout the project, the contractor will continue meetings with tourism/hospitality industries as needed for input to improve tourism in the County and begin developing a strategy to connect assets, festivals and hospitality services in a sustainable manner. During the strategies development effort, proposed strategies will be developed including a business plan that includes a suggested tourism funding structure and budget developed through meetings with tourism industry leaders, County officials, municipal officials, and the Henry County Tourism Bureau and the Henry County Economic Partnership. Approval/concurrence of the tourism restructuring strategies will include outreach to the County, municipalities and the Henry County Tourism Bureau.

The development of strategies to reestablish a tourism board/bureau and reinvigorating tourism in Henry County will include meetings and outreach to the following stakeholders:

1. Henry County Board and staff;
2. Municipalities in the County: Alpha, Andover, Annawan, Atkinson, Bishop Hill, Cambridge, Cleveland, Colona, Galva, Geneseo, Hooppole, Kewanee, Orion, and Woodhull;
3. Henry County Economic Development Partnership;
4. Galva, Kewanee, and Geneseo Chambers of Commerce;
5. Lodging managers/owners including campground owners;
6. Recreation site managers including Friends of the Hennepin Canal;
7. Travel Agencies;
8. Destination restaurants in each community;
9. Heartland Connections, Crossroad Cultural Connections, festival coordinators, performing arts venues in all communities/county;
10. Mainstreet organizations where applicable;
11. Recreation/sport venues including golf clubs;
12. Bishop Hill Heritage Association and other historic site coordinators in each community; and
13. Others identified during the outreach process.

## CONTRACTOR QUALIFICATIONS

The successful contractor will have the following qualifications:

1. Previous experience and knowledge of Henry County, Illinois
2. Knowledge of tourism industry
3. Excellent written and verbal communication skills with presentation skills
4. Ability to participate in public and private meetings with some evening and weekend work required
5. Ability to collect data from multiple resources, conduct analysis, write reports
6. Ability to disseminate information to various audiences
7. Possess vehicle for business related travel across Henry County
8. Excellent organizational, planning, and accuracy skills
9. Strong computer skills
10. Previous experience with rural development, planning, and or research, report writing, public involvement, and grant writing
11. AA or BA in Economic Development, Planning, Geography, Public Administration, or similar degree required

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Cover letter.
2. General qualifications of the contractor including resume.
3. Minimum of three specific examples and references of similar projects conducted.
4. Understanding of tourism.
5. Approach to the project with consideration timeframe presented required to complete the project.
6. The estimated cost range for a nine month project as described is \$45,000 or \$50,000 and a travel allowance.
7. Progress payments will be made on a monthly or biweekly basis upon receipt and approval of performance reports.

## SCHEDULE

The project is anticipated to take nine months to complete upon execution of the grant contract with the State of Illinois. The proposed efforts on a monthly basis are outlined below:

- Month 1: Approve contract with tourism contractor and establish office in Henry County Court House to be provided at no charge.
- Months 2,3,4: Contractor schedules meetings with tourism industry and Henry County Tourism Bureau and Henry County Economic Partnership, reviews 2013 plan and begin updates, visits all tourism assets throughout Henry County, begins tourism website management and updates. Initial visits/meetings to include Henry County Economic Development Director
- Months 4,5,6: Continue meetings Henry County Tourism Bureau with tourism/hospitality industries to gather input to improve tourism in the County, begin developing strategy to connect assets, festivals and hospitality services in a sustainable manner including a calendar and develop potential bus tours from other areas/communities, continue website updates/ management, develop printed directory of tourist assets, facilities, and organizations
- Months 7,8: Draft proposed tourism strategies document and annual budget plan for a staffed tourism office and meet with Henry County Tourism Bureau,

tourism industry leaders, County officials, municipal officials, and Henry County Economic Partnership to review/present proposed structure, continue website updates/management. Data assistance for the document to be provided by Bi-State Regional Commission.

Month 9: Gather approval/concurrence of tourism strategies document, publish final documents with processing and mapping assistance for document to be provided by Bi-State Regional Commission.

- Ongoing
- Meetings the tourism industry leaders, County officials, municipal officials, and Henry County Tourism Bureau and Henry County Economic Partnership, festival coordinators, etc. as needed.
  - Monthly performance reports stating all activities conducted and outcomes of those activities.
  - Reports on efforts/successes in increasing non-resident stays.

The submittals will be reviewed based upon:

- Experience of the Individual 25%
- Understanding of Tourism 25%
- Knowledge of Henry County Area 25%
- Approach to the Project 25%

The Project Review Team includes:

Erin Knackstedt, Interim Henry County Tourism Director, County Administrator

Jim Kelly, Henry County Economic Development Director

Gary Bradley, Chair Henry County Economic Development Partnership and  
Henry County Tourism Bureau

Steve Brown, Henry County Tourism Board Member, Village of Cambridge  
Administrator

Kippy Breeden, Henry County Board Chair

Following review of the submittals, a maximum of four individuals will be interviewed. Additional information may be requested prior to the interview. Interviews will be conducted as arranged and may or may not include all those who submit proposals.

#### TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Henry County Board reserves the right to reject any or all submittals and to extend the submittal deadline. Proposals for services shall be submitted to Erin Knackstedt, Interim Tourism Director/County Administrator, no later than noon on February 23, 2023. The contact information is as follows:

e-mail: Erin Knackstedt (Henry County, IL) [eknackstedt@henrycty.com](mailto:eknackstedt@henrycty.com)