



CHOOSE CHICAGO

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Creative Services & Strategic Media Planning

Key Dates	Date / Detail
Issue date	Wednesday, October 14, 2026
Confirm participation & submit questions	Tuesday, October 20, 2026
RFP due	Friday, November 13, 2026, 5:00 PM CT
RFP contact	Caroline Theis, ctheis@choosechicago.com (cc: Angela Hearn, ahearn@choosechicago.com)

1. About This RFP

Choose Chicago, the official destination marketing organization for the City of Chicago, exists to enrich our community by attracting meetings, events, and leisure travelers to Chicago. We are seeking creative and media planning agency partners to help us deliver on that mission in bolder, smarter ways.

We are looking for partners, not vendors. Choose Chicago has in-house talent and AI capabilities across media planning and creative, and we want agencies that will work as an extension of our team, challenging our thinking, backing recommendations with data, and moving fast when Chicago has a moment. Most of all, we want ideas no destination anywhere has tried, the kind that make Chicago the most competitive and creative destination brand in the world.

Choose Chicago is open to one agency for both Creative Services and Strategic Media Planning, or separate agencies working together. Kickoff is anticipated in January 2027. Term length, renewal options, and termination provisions will be defined during contracting.

2. How We Will Work Together

Together, we expect to execute integrated messaging and marketing across platforms, seasons, and audiences, in tandem with our inhouse team and PR agencies. Detailed expectations for each partner are in Section 3.

Choose Chicago	Media agency	Creative studio
• In-house media and creative teams • AI tools that analyze our data, target markets, seasonal patterns, and competitive destinations • Ownership of our brand platforms • Deep knowledge of Chicago	• Leads inspiration to conversion investment strategy in primary and emerging markets. • Develops activations, sponsorships, brand deals, and destination takeovers that take Chicago beyond paid media. • Acts on trends and cultural moments within days.	• Designs for how B2B and B2C audiences want to connect with our brand. • Brings user-generated content into our channels and co-builds every experience with media and comms. • Scalable production capabilities.

3. Scope of Services

3.1 Creative Services

We are looking for a creative partner that works like a studio: nimble, collaborative, and design led. Creative work should be developed to scale and travel, built for national and global leisure and meetings audiences and adaptable across paid, owned, and earned formats. Our work is currently anchored by two brand platforms: Never Done. Never Outdone. and All for the Love of Chicago. The goal is to elevate these platforms into a bigger, more culturally resonant national and global presence, and to earn attention well beyond paid media.

We expect the creative studio to deliver:

- **Brand campaign creative:** Campaign concepting and creative territories that extend Never Done. Never Outdone. and All for the Love of Chicago, for leisure and meetings audiences.
- **Creative risk:** Go beyond expected destination advertising with bold ideas, unexpected formats, and work that sparks conversation. We want the studio to bring ideas that stretch us, take real creative risks, and test and learn quickly from what works.
- **Audience-first design:** Channel-specific creative designed around how each audience wants to discover, engage with, and connect with Chicago, and built natively for each channel.
- **User-generated content:** Ways to bring user-generated content from visitors, locals, and creators into our primary channels, including sourcing, rights management, curation, and creative frameworks that make it work at scale.
- **Experience & engagement design:** Work hand in hand with our team to build out each activation, brand deal, destination takeover, and trend moment: shaping the idea, designing the experience, and creating the assets.
- **Rapid-response creative:** Rapid-response creative templates or frameworks designed in advance, so the studio can move quickly when a cultural moment emerges.

3.2 Strategic Media Planning

Choose Chicago's paid media program spans drive, fly, and international markets. The media agency will bring the strategy, expertise, and relationships to turn our data into results, planning and placing the portions of the program that benefit most from agency expertise and scale. The goal is to grow visitation and visitor spend, build year-round demand, win new and priority markets, and move at the speed of culture. Activations, trends, and brand deals are a priority and a significant growth opportunity for Choose Chicago.

We expect the media agency to deliver:

- **Investment strategy:** Co-author an investment strategy across audiences, markets, channels, and seasons, and when to shift it.
- **Full-funnel planning:** Balance always-on brand media with tactical campaigns that flex with demand, booking pace, and airlift, moving travelers from inspiration to booking and connecting paid with earned, owned, and activation calendars.
- **Seasonal & audience targeting:** International and long-haul visitors in peak season, drive and regional visitors in shoulder and low seasons, and meetings audiences aligned to the convention calendar, with a tailored approach for each period.
- **Activations, brand deals & takeovers:** Source, negotiate, and lead an annual slate of activations, sponsorships, brand deals, and destination takeovers that earn attention beyond paid reach.
- **Trend & cultural moment response:** Act on Chicago moments.
- **Market access & new platforms:** Secure premium inventory and partnerships in priority markets and bring Chicago onto new platforms early.
- **AI-enabled optimization:** Build upon our in-house tools to sharpen targeting, optimize in near-real time, and forecast outcomes, with AI informing, not replacing, strategic judgment.

3.3 Measurement & Accountability

Agencies should bring a measurement framework that combines traditional, verifiable media metrics reported against Tourism Economics benchmarks and our existing KPIs. We also expect holdout and incrementality testing to show what each tactic adds, results by funnel stage, and a clear point of view on how success will be defined for activations, sponsorships, AI-optimized placements, and trend-responsive content that do not fit traditional metrics. Reporting should follow a standard cadence and dashboard, tailored to our seasonal and audience priorities.

4. Qualifications

	Creative studios	Media agencies
Minimum	• Both B2C and B2B creative experience • Proven campaign creative for national and international markets, adapted to be culturally relevant to each audience	• Both B2C and B2B media experience • Planning and managing a broad range of media investments across national and international markets

	Creative studios	Media agencies
Preferred	• Travel, tourism, hospitality, or other experience-driven brands (helpful, not required) • User-generated and creator content programs at scale • Designing experiences and engagement for activations and partnerships, working alongside media and PR partners • Rapid-response creative executed on a compressed timeline, with examples • Meetings and events marketing experience	• Travel, tourism, hospitality, or other experience-driven brands (helpful, not required) • Activation, sponsorship, brand deal, and destination takeover experience, with outcomes • Trend-driven work executed on a compressed timeline • Applied AI in strategy, planning, or buying, with specific outcomes • Experience with clients that manage some media in-house • Meetings and events marketing experience

5. Response Requirements

Agencies may apply for Creative Services, Strategic Media Planning, or both. Each discipline is evaluated independently, and a small number of finalists per discipline will receive briefing materials and an assigned exercise to present virtually. Submit one PDF of no more than 15 pages, excluding the cover sheet and case studies; agencies applying for both may submit up to 20 pages, with the creative and media sections separated.

Section	What to include	Applies to
Cover sheet	Agency name, locations, primary contact, and discipline(s): Creative / Media / Both	All
Agency overview	History, ownership, size, and current clients, noting B2C and B2B work	All
Relevant experience	Two to three case studies with outcomes, including at least one B2C and one B2B example and at least one activation, partnership, or rapid-response example; awards if applicable	All
Team	Proposed structure, key personnel, and where each is based	All
Big ideas (required)	At least one bold activation, brand deal, or trend idea for the first year, plus up to one more thought starter. These need not be fully developed.	All
Creative approach	How you would deliver the expectations in Section 3.1, including your creative process, your approach to risk, and how you would bring user-generated content into our primary channels.	Creative

Section	What to include	Applies to
Media approach	How you would deliver on Section 3.2, including an illustrative allocation across inspiration, engagement, and conversion; your media mix, geographic targeting, and seasonal approach; how quickly you act on cultural moments; how AI supports your strategic judgment rather than replacing it; and the range of annual media budgets you manage, including your largest account.	Media
Collaboration	How you would work with our in-house team and communications agencies	All
Measurement	Framework, reporting cadence, and dashboard (Section 3.3)	All
Creative compensation	Retainer, project, or hybrid. State your preferred model and how rapid-response creative would be scoped and priced.	Creative
Media compensation	Fee, commission, or hybrid; how activations, brand deals, and takeovers would be scoped and priced; and how it would flex as the mix of agency-placed and in-house media evolves.	Media
Rapid-response budget	How a contingency or rapid-response budget could be structured so the agency can act within days, not weeks.	All
Transparency	We value full transparency. Please separate working media from non-working costs and outline all fees, markups, rebates, and platform charges, including any owned or affiliated platforms or vendors you would use.	All
Supplier diversity	Any MBE/WBE/DBE certifications and your approach to diverse-owned participation on this account.	All

6. Submission Instructions & Timeline

- **Confirm intent and submit questions** in writing to Caroline Theis (ctheis@choosechicago.com) by the date in the timeline below.
- **Submit your PDF** to ctheis@choosechicago.com, cc: ahearn@choosechicago.com, by the response deadline below. Late submissions will not be considered.
- **Direct all communication** about this RFP to the RFP contact. Respondents bear all costs of preparing responses and presentations.

Milestone	Date
RFP issued	Wednesday, October 14, 2026
Confirm participation & submit questions	Tuesday, October 20, 2026
Written answers issued	Monday, October 26, 2026
RFP due	Friday, November 13, 2026, 5:00 PM CT
Finalists notified; exercise issued	Tuesday, November 17, 2026
Kickoff	January 2027

Dates are subject to change. Confirmed respondents will be notified in writing.

7. Confidentiality & Reservation of Rights

Responses will be used solely for evaluation and shared only with Choose Chicago staff and advisors involved in this process. Choose Chicago may modify the scope, timeline, or process; accept or reject any response; request additional information; or end this process at any time without liability. Issuing this RFP does not obligate Choose Chicago to award a contract.