



**DATE:** April 11, 2024  
**SUBJECT:** Letter of Clarification  
**RE:** International Representative Services (U.K.) RFP  
**TO:** All Prospective Proposers

Houston First Corporation (“HFC”) issues this Letter of Clarification regarding the referenced International Representative Services (U.K.) Request for Proposals to answer questions timely received in the manner set forth below:

**Question 1:** Is the dedicated person for PR in the U.K. seen by HFC as the same person as the trade travel person or two different people, and therefore are both expected to work 100% of their full-time hours on Houston alone?

Answer: Having considered several inquiries on use of the term “dedicated” in the RFP, and in the interests of reducing potential costs, HFC would like to clarify – is open to considering – that the U.K. representative need not be exclusive to the Houston account. HFC strongly prefers, however, that the primary contact be in travel trade. Such individual, or their firm, could engage a media representative separately, on a part-time basis, or through a subcontractor.

**Question 2:** What’s the split of time you would like to see for consumer media relations vs. trade media relations, and for combined media relations vs. trade/tourism marketing & development?

Answer: Approximately 60% of the time will be spent on trade/tourism activities & 40% PR-related activities. Consumer media vs. trade media will be 50/50.

**Question 3:** Do you currently have U.K. representation?

Answer: HFC has had limited, indirect media representation in the U.K. through a German-based representative. HFC expects that a U.K.-based representative would be better suited to achieve its goals.

**Question 4:** Will the agency selected report to HFC (in Houston) or someone in the U.K.?

Answer: HFC.

**Question 5:** Will HFC consider revising or replacing legal terms and conditions provided in the International Representative Services Agreement?

Answer: No. HFC is a local governmental corporation and other providers of comparable services have accepted the same form of agreement. Any request of attempt to modify to the terms and conditions by a Proposer, including, by way of example and not limitation,

the Release, Indemnification, Limitation of Liability, term/renewal option, or termination provisions are hereby rejected. Submission of pre-printed forms, redlined/alternative provisions, or other manner of objection to legal terms and conditions provided in the International Representative Services Agreement by a Proposer shall result in a Proposal being deemed non-responsive.

**Question 6:** Does HFC have a proposed budget for retainer fees or is this up to the Proposer to suggest?

Answer: No budget figure for retainer fees will be provided.

**Question 7:** Do we assume the contract start date is July 1, 2024?

Answer: Services are to commence as soon as the agreement is signed, likely to occur in May of June of 2024.

**Question 8:** Do hard costs associated with proposed activity – such as hotels for press trips, event space hire for missions etc. – need to be included within the budget?

Answer: No.

**Question 9:** Through which months does HFC's fiscal year run?

Answer: HFC uses the calendar year.

**Question 10:** Will the budget for fam/press trip costs (flights, hotels, on the ground expenses) be handled internally by the Proposer and does this need to be outlined within the response?

Answer: Approved expenses are reimbursable under the terms of the International Representative Services Agreement. Estimates do not need to be included in the proposal and will vary over the course of the agreement term.

**Question 11:** Is there a maximum budget for press trips we should be aiming towards?

Answer: No.

**Question 12:** Would you provide a breakdown of the annual marketing budget to be shared across media, marketing and trade tourism?

Answer: Not at this time.

**Question 13:** Are there any overarching brand campaigns currently that Proposers should be aware of, and do you have an existing consumer marketing strategy that you can share?

Answer: HFC does most of such work with Brand USA and Travel Texas. It is mostly reactive and not proactive at this time. Additional detail will be shared with the Proposer selected.

**Question 14:** What advertising or online marketing activity does HFC currently undertake in the U.K., if any?

Answer: HFC advertises with Expedia, Brand USA, and various tour operators.

**Question 15:** Article II, Section 3 of the Scope provides as follows: Generate measurable results from marketing efforts, including advertising value of media coverage generated and exposure of the Houston travel product to targeted consumers; 15 million impressions for the U.K. through positive media outreach throughout the year. Does “15 million impressions” comprise print circulation and website monthly visitor figures combined?

Answer: Yes.

**Question 16:** Please provide examples of trade shows or events related to the film or television production industry which the appointed agency may be required to attend on behalf of the Houston Film Commission.

Answer: Film festivals or a yet-to-be determined events in London.

**Question 17:** Please provide more detail (and exactly what would be required from the appointed agency) regarding Article III, Section 2 of the Scope, which provides as follows: Assist HFC in the promotion of its owned trade shows, such as Comicpalooza and others in the Territory. This will include helping build attendance or bringing exhibitors for these shows, helping co-locate Territory meetings with the Houston-based meetings and promoting such trade shows to travel professionals.

Answer: This could involve marketing and outreach efforts within the Territory to identify potential exhibitors, meeting planners, and attendees interested in showcasing or attending Houston-based events. This also includes developing partnerships with travel agencies, tour operators, and other travel planners to promote attendance at Houston-based conferences and trade shows.

**Question 18:** How does Houston typically partner with Brand USA and Texas Tourism - are there annual events Houston participates in under the Brand USA or Texas Tourism umbrella, co-ops, etc.?

Answer: HFC works with Brand USA and Travel Texas on campaigns, familiarization tours, trade shows and events.

**Question 19:** The scope of services includes maintaining a Houston specific email and phone number for all inquiries related to Houston. Is this in existence already and what is the policy on reply times e.g. 24 hours (when not urgent)? And what hours are expected to be covered on the phone? We are trying to understand if we need to cover off a call-center-type service for customers or just press enquiries that diverts to a U.K. number. Is this email or phone number going to be promoted anywhere on tourism sites, etc.?

Answer: Yes, HFC will establish a Houston-specific email address for all inquiries. Responses are required within 24-48 hours. HFC acknowledges the U.K. time zone difference and will schedule communications and meetings during U.K. work hours to accommodate the selected proposer. No call center operations are involved. Press inquiries from the U.K. will be directed through the selected proposer or the HFC PR team, as appropriate, with awareness of the time difference. Contact information, including email and phone number, will be promoted selectively at trade shows, fam tours, and specific events, at the discretion of HFC.

**Question 20:** Is there any demographic data you have from previous campaigns on U.K. segmentation for visiting Houston?

Answer: HFC has developed demographic information through certain contractors and from participating in campaigns with Brand USA, airlines, OTAs, and tour operators. Specific information will be shared with the Proposer selected.

**Question 21:** What level of activity have you done in the U.K. before now? What has worked and what has not?

Answer: HFC has worked through a German-based representative who has provided limited media representation in the U.K. Over the years, HFC has also participated in trade shows and sales missions. Most activities have rendered positive outcomes, HFC is now seeking greater opportunities to engage the U.K. market.

**Question 22:** Is collecting the room night numbers is already something that HFC does and if U.K. tour operators are already providing these statistics on a regular basis, or if it is a new process that is being introduced?

Answer: HFC receives room night numbers from some, but not all, tour operators.

**Question 23:** Is the Irish market be included as part of the RFP?

Answer: Not currently, though HFC is open to considering future PR and travel trade opportunities in Ireland.

**Question 24:** Who do you consider to be your key competitors/who do you consider to be a conflict of interest?

Answer: Key competitive markets include Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, L.A., and Miami. Proposers who have a conflict of interest (actual or appearing to a reasonable person to exist) are to disclose such conflict in their proposal.

**Question 25:** Which destinations are you open to working closely with?

Answer: HFC works closely with several destinations on campaigns, trade shows and events that align with our goals. We work with both Travel Texas and Brand USA on multi-city campaigns and events, and manage Around Houston – a co-op program, including 14 cities surrounding Houston. HFC is open to exploring partnerships with any destination that seeks to work on projects that align with our goals.

**Question 26:** What U.K. partners do you already work closely with?

Answer: To name a few, British Airways, Travelbag, and Jetset.

**Question 27:** What are your big news stories/ key messages for 2024 (e.g., key events, hotel openings)?

Answer: HFC is off to a strong start in 2024, with a line-up of events and conventions planned. The HFC Tourism Department recently introduced the [Houston Signature](#)

Experiences. HFC is excited to host the PCMA conference in 2025 and seven FIFA matches in 2026. New developments include the opening of The Thompson Houston by Hyatt and Moxy Houston Downtown, with Hotel St. Augustine set to open this year. For more news and updates on Houston, visit <https://www.visithoustontexas.com/> and <https://www.houstonfirst.com/news/>.

**Question 28:** What campaigns have you done recently that you are really proud of?

Answer: The Frontiers campaign, in collaboration with Travel Texas cities and MDSG, achieved significant success. HFC also worked with Singapore Airlines to promote the direct flight to Manchester, which received high levels of engagement.

**Question 29:** What are the biggest challenges for your destination currently?

Answer: Most all destinations face challenges as it relates to travel and tourism and one for us is the training of our hospitality personnel. To tackle this, we've recently redesigned and relaunched the Houston Insider Program. For more details on this initiative, [please see here](#).

**Question 30:** What is the average number of room nights for the British traveller?

Answer: In 2023, HFC estimates that the U.K. region contributed to 119,000 overnight guests, resulting in a total of 300,000 room nights. The average duration of stay was 2.5 days.

**Question 31:** What is the current demographic of the British visitor?

Answer: Most visitors coming from the U.K. are business travellers. Over the years, this has resulted in repeat visitation to Houston with family. Additionally, the British visitor is one that has been to most major destinations in the United States and is looking for something new. Most travel with family.

**Question 32:** Is there a particular demographic that you would want to target and, if so, why?

Answer: HFC would like to focus on family travel and cultural and culinary travellers.

**Question 33:** Do you currently have an online training platform for the U.K. trade?

Answer: Yes, please visit <https://www.houstontravelpro.com/main>.

**Question 34:** Can you elaborate on Exhibit "A", II Tourism – point 10: 'Maintain communication with top producers in key and secondary markets' what do you consider as a secondary market?

Answer: The key market is the U.K. region, as they have shown strong engagement and travel pattern with Houston in the last few years. Secondary markets could include Ireland.

**Question 35:** Is four fam trips is a minimum or maximum requirement and are these individuals or groups visiting the city?

Answer: Four tourism fam trips per year is an estimate. Participants could be a mixture of individuals or groups.

**Question 36:** Is there a requirement number of participants per fam trip?

Answer: The number of participants will vary, though HFC prefers small groups.

**Question 37:** Do journalists need an I-visa to go on a press trip? Is it government funded?

Answer: Not that we have experienced.

**Question 38:** Do journalists need flight support from tour operators?

Answer: Yes.

**Question 39:** Do you work closely with Brand USA and Travel Texas?

Answer: Yes.

**Question 40:** Do you work with and budget for influencers?

Answer: Yes.

**Question 41:** What is the budget for press trips and how many press trips are expected each year?

Answer: HFC estimates 4–6 per year. Budget will be allocated as needed.

Letters of Clarification become a part of the Invitation to Bid automatically upon issuance and supersede any previous specifications and/or provisions in conflict therewith. By submitting their bid, bidders are deemed to have received all Letters of Clarification and to have incorporated them into their bid.