

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Perception Research for Visitors to North East England (amended Jan 2026)

1. Introduction

This research is commissioned by NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) on behalf of our regional partners. We are seeking proposals from research agencies to conduct comprehensive perception research among current, lapsed, and potential domestic and international visitors to the region. This research will directly inform a regional branding project looking to create a brand promoting the North east as a compelling and distinctive place to visit.

The study will focus on current perceptions of **County Durham, Newcastle, Gateshead, Northumberland (LVEP) and other regional partners North and South Tyneside and Sunderland.**

2. Background

North east England is a region with strong cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and diverse visitor experiences. To support future marketing, destination development strategies, partners require robust and actionable insights into how the region is perceived by leisure visitors both domestically and internationally.

North east England has led on a four-year government destination development pilot (DDP) focusing on partnership work to unlock the region's full tourism potential by building on its distinctive strengths. The pilot aims were to shift the region from being perceived as a short-stay or secondary destination to a compelling year-round place to visit and return to. Central to the pilot is a place-based approach which aligns national (Visit England) tourism priorities with regional identity, ensuring that growth is inclusive, resilient, and rooted in the North East's unique character.

This RFP aims to build on the collaborative work driven through the DDP and from 2026 within the North east combined authority (NECA) commissioning research that will apply to both domestic and international visitors to:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses in regional visitor perceptions.
- Understand drivers of visitation and barriers to travel.
- Explore the awareness and distinctiveness of each sub area and identify and shared perceptions narrative.

3. Objectives

The selected partner will design and deliver a research programme that addresses the following core objectives:

- Perception Benchmarking: Measure current perceptions of North East England as a destination to visit.
- Regional Differentiation: Give clarity to levels of awareness and perception of destinations within the North East and where our strengths lie across different markets: **Newcastle/Gateshead, County Durham, Northumberland** and Sunderland, North and South Tyneside.
- Visitor Motivations & Barriers: Identify reasons for visiting, emotional drivers, and practical barriers.
- Identify connecting visitor strands which would support a unified call to action for future consumer marketing.
- Recommendations: Provide clear, evidence-based perception guidance to inform a subsequent branding project.
- ***Including examining how the research outcomes feed into audience Segmentation and persona. NB we are awaiting an updated audience segmentation from Visit England which will enable us to profile our visitors in a consistent way.***

4. Scope of Work

The research programme should include, at minimum:

- Desk Research: Review of existing perception, tourism, and competitor data.
- Quantitative Research: A statistically robust survey, across UK and international markets. Proposals should suggest appropriate sample sizes. We want to understand perceptions amongst residents, out of region visitors and non-visitors of the region. We anticipate that this phase would determine the markets we test in the qualitative phase of work. (i.e. we expect for international research at this stage we test across multiple markets and refine for the qualitative phase)

International Market suggestions:

- I. Netherlands
- II. Ireland
- III. France
- IV. Germany
- V. Spain
- VI. US

- Qualitative Research: Focus groups, in depth interviews, or online communities to explore perceptions in depth.
- Competitor Analysis: Benchmark against relevant UK competitor destinations.
- Reporting & Insights: A final report, regional breakdowns, dashboards, and presentation of findings. We are able to offer additional support including supporting with existing perception research already undertaken by the individual areas of the region.
- ***Bidders may propose additional methodologies they feel will strengthen the research.***

5. Deliverables

The successful bidder will be expected to deliver:

- Research design and methodology plan.
- Fieldwork implementation and interim updates.
- A final written report with clear insights and recommendations.
- Sub area analysis for County Durham, Newcastle, Gateshead, Northumberland, Sunderland and North and South Tyneside.
- Data tables and raw anonymised data files.
- Presentations/workshop for key stakeholders to cover outcomes

6. Timeline

Please provide a detailed project plan that includes:

- Project initiation.
- Research design approval.
- Fieldwork timeline.
- Analysis and reporting stages.
- What could be achieved by March 2026
- What the final delivery timeline would be.

7. Budget

- Bidders should supply a comprehensive budget including:
 - Costs for each methodological component.
 - Itemised expenses.
 - Optional enhancements or alternative research approaches -if your organisation also covers brand development please highlight as this will be the following step in the process.
- As a guide we would be willing to invest circa £50,000 into this work however we would like bidders to provide costs they believe would provide the most robust options for the delivery of this work. We would also be interested in hearing from agencies able to take the next steps (not included in this RFP) which is supporting segmentation and brand work.

8. Evaluation Criteria

- Proposals will be evaluated on the following:
 - Demonstrated experience conducting destination perception research.
 - Methodological robustness and creativity.
 - Ability to deliver actionable insights.
 - Value for money.
 - Team expertise and relevant case studies.

9. Submission Requirements

- Proposals must include:
 - Company overview and credentials.
 - Proposed methodology and approach.
 - Timeline and milestones.
 - Detailed budget.
 - Examples of previous similar work.
 - Key staff assigned to the project.

10. Submission Deadline

All proposals must be submitted by **28th January** to Laura Freer (Assistant Director Visitor Economy) Laura.freer@ngi.org.uk

We would seek to hold **inception meeting week commencing 2nd February** so please inform us of any dates you would not be able to do during that week

11. Contact Information

For questions or clarifications, please get in touch.