

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

**DEVELOPMENT OF STATEWIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BRAND, MESSAGING, AND SUPPORTING CAMPAIGN**

Issue Date: Thursday, September 17, 2020

RFP Response Deadline: Friday, October 2, 2020

Illinois Community College Marketing Collaborative – Statewide College Branding Initiative

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Illinois Community College Marketing Collaborative (hereinafter "ICCMC") is inviting responsible Vendors (hereinafter "Bidder", "Contractor", or "Firm") to submit bids for the development of a statewide community college brand and strategy, with supporting messaging and campaign elements. A more complete description of the services sought is provided in the Bid Specifications/Scope of Work of this RFP. If you are interested and able to meet these requirements, we would appreciate and welcome a bid. This RFP will set forth any evaluation criteria to be used in determining product or service acceptability. It may require the submission of bid samples, descriptive literature, technical data, references, licenses, or other information or material.

NOTE: Unsolicited bid samples or descriptive literature however, are submitted at the vendor's risk, may not be examined or tested, will not be deemed to vary any of the provisions of the RFP, and may not be utilized by the vendor to contest a decision or understanding with the ICCMC.

The ICCMC reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal.

BACKGROUND

It is an essential time to be a community college. Communities across the nation – and within Illinois – are looking to community colleges both for traditional, transferable degrees, as well as to successfully prepare local citizens for a career in technical fields that help advance economic development within their local/regional areas. As state and private universities continue to experience increased tuition and decreased enrollment, community colleges have the unique opportunity to provide a balanced offering of rigor and value, poising them for increased enrollment, collaboration, and innovation. Further, the agility of community colleges allows for enhanced responsiveness to local industry needs and with K-12 educational partners.

The enormous benefits of attending a community college are being more acknowledged than ever at the both the state and national level, yet the saturation of benefit messages remains a challenge across many markets, with many individuals continuing to be diverted by misconceptions of the community (or “junior”) college environment.

An additional level of complexity due to the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged in 2020. While the community college environment allows for an easy pivot to different delivery modes, the additional stress and strain of economic and health challenges have emerged for students and their families. So, now community colleges must be both focused on telling their story of relevance, and also convince many to continue moving forward with their education at a time when many simply wish to pause on making decisions.

Given this complex intersection of community college viability and the timing of a global pandemic, there is a tremendous opportunity to transform the public perception of community colleges, specifically in Illinois, to tell the true story of opportunity, accessibility, and success.

For this effort, the ICCMC’s focus is to:

- Identify the core statewide community college brand to maximize awareness and understanding of community colleges among key/target constituencies throughout the state.
- Coordinate a statewide branding initiative among the state’s community colleges.
- Design appropriate messaging and cost-effective public relations strategies to support the statewide community college branding process.
- Ensure strategies and channels reach all communities in Illinois.
- Integrate creative digital and social media content and campaigns, and consider additional communication tools.

SCOPE OF WORK/BID SPECIFICATIONS

The ICCMC, with support from the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents (ICCP) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), desires to implement a statewide brand effort, consisting of the following phases:

- **Phase 1: Comprehensive Brand Study**
- **Phase 2: Strategy Development, Visual Identity, and Messaging**
- **Phase 3: Brand Implementation Plan**
- **Phase 4: Campaign Elements and Execution with Key Metrics**

NOTE: The frequency of events and programs will in part be determined by the chosen vendor/firm's recommendations.

Overview and Specifications:

The overview and specifications for the ICCMC statewide branding initiative follow. All interested vendors/firms are expected to include a proposal that responds to the needs indicated below. If any major changes to the frequency or cost of the program occur during the timeframe of the contract, the pricing difference will need to be made in writing.

Rationale/Need:

- Shift in community college presence within the state
- Increased collaboration with the community, with education partners, with industry
- Budgetary implications (funding in higher education)
- Enrollments
- Preparation for future fundraising and development initiatives
- Enhance level of credibility through more polished overall look and feel
- Continuity across messaging
- Shared toolbox of messaging and resources
- COVID-19 barrier to education

Primary Goals:

- Align visual identity and key messages across the state
- Create better, more cohesive awareness among local, regional, and statewide community of community college benefits through a solid, consistent visual identity
- Identify the unique position that only IL community colleges can claim in the marketplace (point of differentiation)
- Create brand champions and influencers to tell the same story
- Visually identify the relevance, appeal, and uniqueness of the IL community college brand to students, prospective students, and the community

Primary/Target Audiences:

- Traditional Age Students (age 25 and under)
- Adult Learners (over 25)

Secondary Audience:

- Parents

Possible Focus Areas for Messaging:

- Perception of community colleges

- Promotion of positive elements, benefits (vs. focusing on negative stereotypes)
- Emphasis on quality, improving one's life, affordability
- Highlight benefits around: rigor and quality; cost; flexibility; access; and diversity of programming

Services Requested (by phase and with proposed timeframes):

- **Phase 1: Comprehensive Brand Study**

(Timeframe: November 2020-January 2021)

- Review survey results of ICCMC internal survey
- Study of any prior related research collected by the ICCMC as related to community college branding
- Evaluate the collective community college brand identity among different audiences and demographics to determine perception in community, compared with goals and strategic direction (to include how prospective students are connecting with their community colleges to make enrollment decisions and evaluation of digital presence via web and social)
- Conduct and/or review qualitative and quantitative research with key stakeholder groups

- **Phase 2: Strategy Development, Visual Identity, and Messaging**

(Timeframe: February-May 2021)

- Develop Brand Positioning Statement
- Develop Value Proposition, including by segment for:
 - Traditional-age students
 - Adult learners
 - Parents
 - Others, as determined by group
- Assess proposed positioning through additional testing
- Design and test a visual representation of the brand identity, including any mark, typeface/fonts, creative, color palette, and other visual elements
- Create a list of key marketing messages that support the brand, tailored to target audiences
- Develop an identity system with style guide to assist users in how the brand identity should be used in a variety of applications and in conjunction with the any individual community college efforts, including:
 - Print (flyer/brochure, direct marketing piece)
 - TV and Radio
 - Digital (webpage, social media)
 - Outdoor

- **Phase 3: Brand Implementation Plan**

(Timeframe: June-July 2021)

- Create a best-practice, multi-channel campaign and schedule for cost-effective brand implementation to support the statewide effort – consideration will be given to:
 - Print
 - TV and Radio
 - Digital Media
 - Social Media content

- Outdoor
- Additional recommended tools
- **Phase 4: Campaign Elements and Execution with Key Metrics**
(Timeframe: start in August 2021)
 - Identify key metrics for how campaign will be measured
 - Number of students enrolled
 - Perception changes of target audience(s)
 - Other, as determined
 - Campaign implementation, as directed by ICCMC – to include:
 - Creation of brand video(s) and other digital content
 - Social media content
 - Scheduling of media mix/buys
 - Collateral material – to be determined during project

Suggested References:

- Strategic Plans, Annual Reports
- Public Websites, Brand Webpages
- Recent Community College Media Coverage
- Social Media Presence

INSTRUCTIONS TO BIDDERS

Key Dates:

The following dates are set forth for informational and planning purposes; however, the ICCMC reserves the right to change the dates if necessary.

RFP Issued	Thursday, September 17, 2020
Last Day for Questions from Vendors	Thursday, September 24, 2020
Addendum for Response to Questions from Vendors	Friday, September 25, 2020
Bids Due	Friday, October 2, 2020
Reviewed by ICCMC Executive Team (selection team)	October 5-9, 2020
Finalists Selected and Contacted	Friday, October 9, 2020
Finalist Interviews Conducted	Friday, October 16, 2020
Recommendation Shared with Full ICCMC and Presidents	Wednesday, October 21, 2020
Notification of Award Sent to Vendor	Friday, October 23, 2020
Contract Start Date	Monday, November 2, 2020

Bid/Proposal Format:

- Cover Letter
- Experience and Operational Plan (including timeline and schedule of progress updates)
- Link/Reference to Previous, Relevant Work
- Biographies of Account Team
- Total cost for work with budget for each component
- Professional Client References (3)

Bid/Proposal Must Include the Following Components:

- The vendor/firm's qualifications and experiences in performing work directly related to the scope of work outlined in this request
- Examples and results of previous work completed in this area, specifically with community colleges
- Summary of why the vendor/firm's team is a good fit for this project
- Full project cost, as well as breakdown of costs by phase (final Phase 4 may be proposed as an alternate bid)

Packaging of Response:

Bid/proposal may be submitted by mail or email, to include the following information:

- Bidder's complete name and address
- Bid Due Date and Time
- Reference Name/Subject Line: **"ICCMC Brand Project"**

Late Bids: Regardless of cause, late bids will not be accepted and will automatically be disqualified from further consideration.

Bid Preparation Costs: The costs for developing and delivering responses to this RFP are entirely the responsibility of the bidder. The ICCMC is not liable for any expense incurred by the bidder in the preparation and presentation of their bid or any other costs incurred by the bidder prior to execution of a Purchase Order or Contract.

Third Party Specifications:

If it is the intent of the vendor/firm that a third party perform any part of this contract, the ICCMC reserves the right to know the identity of the third party before any contract is awarded. The vendor/firm receiving this contract, however, is responsible for meeting deadlines, fulfilling specifications and for the quality and execution of the program.

Minority, Female, and Persons with Disabilities Participation:

The ICCMC strives to promote the economic development of businesses owned by minorities, females, and persons with disabilities. Consideration will be given as part of the vendor evaluation and selection process.

CONTACT INFORMATION/BID SUBMISSION

The contact identified below is the sole point of contact regarding the RFP from the date of issuance until the selection of the successful vendor.

Christina M. Haggerty, Vice President of Marketing, Communications, and Development
McHenry County College
8900 U.S. Hwy 14
Crystal Lake, IL 60012
Phone: (815) 455-8727
Email: chaggerty@mchenry.edu

Printed or electronic proposals must be delivered no later than 5 p.m. on **Friday, October 2, 2020**. Proposals will be reviewed by members of the ICCMC, and the review will be completed with all submitting vendors notified of finalists by **Friday, October 9, 2020**.

EVALUATION/SELECTION CRITERIA

In evaluating the bids submitted, the ICCMC will apply the “Best Value” standard in selecting the vendor to be awarded a contract for this project. Purchase price/overall cost is not the only criteria that will be used in the evaluation process. Any award resulting from this bid will be made to that vendor whose offer conforms to the bid and it is determined to be the most advantageous, or “best value” to the ICCMC and this project, in the sole judgment of the ICCMC. The selection process will include, but not be limited to, the following considerations and requirements:

- The quality and range of services the vendor/firm proposes to provide.
- Prior, equivalent work experience within higher education, possibly statewide/regional experience.
- Proven success based on enrollment results.
- The ability to provide service in an expedient and efficient manner.
- The vendor/firm’s overall brand experience, reputation, expertise, stability, and financial responsibility.
- The extent to which the services meet ICCMC’s needs.
- The vendor/firm’s ability to assist in meeting the overall goals of the RFP.
- Minority, female, and/or persons with disabilities-owned business.
- The vendor/firm locale.
- The vendor/firm’s past relationship with organizational members of ICCMC, if any.
- The experience of the account/creative team who would work on the project.
- Any other relevant factor that a business entity would consider in selecting a vendor/firm.
- The ability to execute all phases of the project effectively through appropriate and relevant vendor/firm resources and capabilities.

DEVELOPMENT OF STATEWIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE BRAND, MESSAGING, AND SUPPORTING CAMPAIGN

ADDENDUM: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM VENDORS

Key Dates

For reference, the following dates are set forth for informational and planning purposes. The ICCMC reserves the right to change the dates if necessary.

RFP Issued	Thursday, September 17, 2020
Last Day for Questions from Vendors	Thursday, September 24, 2020
Addendum for Response to Questions from Vendors	Friday, September 25, 2020
Bids Due	Friday, October 2, 2020
Reviewed by ICCMC Executive Team (selection team)	October 5-9, 2020
Finalists Selected and Contacted	Friday, October 9, 2020
Finalist Interviews Conducted	Friday, October 16, 2020
Recommendation Shared with Full ICCMC and Presidents	Wednesday, October 21, 2020
Notification of Award Sent to Vendor	Friday, October 23, 2020
Contract Start Date	Monday, November 2, 2020

Questions with Responses

Question	Response
Do you have a preference for location of the firm hired for this assignment?	Upon final consideration, the criteria of an in-state firm will be used as a factor if deciding between two comparable proposals.
Do you have specific criteria for working with minority, female, and/or persons with disabilities owned businesses?	Upon final consideration, the criteria of a minority, female, and/or persons with disabilities owned business will be used as a factor if deciding between two comparable proposals.
Will there be a preference given to firms located in Illinois for this project?	Upon final consideration, the criteria of an in-state firm will be used as a factor if deciding between two comparable proposals.
For the measurement of metrics, will there be one specific landing page developed from which traffic will be directed to each College, or will there be individual College landing pages?	The creation of one landing page for the broader initiative, as well as a template for colleges to use on their respective sites.
Can you provide direction - either general or in detail - on the overall budget for this campaign?	Est. \$100,000
Phase 1 - Regarding the ICCMC internal survey – what topics does the survey cover? And what audiences were surveyed? If it’s easier to just share a copy of the survey with us now, that would be great.	<p>Topics Covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location and market • Breakdown of marketing channels for use • Marketing themes currently used • Deterrents of enrollment • Desired focus of consultant/areas of expertise desired • Audience targets • Key messaging targets • Defining campaign success <p>Respondents/Surveyed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICCMC membership • IL Community college presidents
Phase 1 - Can you give us a sense of what topics, issues, and audiences are covered in the “prior related research” that will be available for the assignment?	We will provide any prior brand/community surveys conducted at individual community colleges.
Phase 1 – For the qual/quant research – we’re thinking we’ll want to do online focus groups with both traditional age and adult community college students across the state. Beyond that, can you give us a sense of the other key stakeholders that ICCMC may be prioritizing for additional research insights, so we can plan accordingly? For example, in the past we have found our clients including stakeholders such as employers, taxpayers, and those in state government with an interest in higher education and workforce development.	<p>Based on feedback from the collective ICCMC, we want to focus on the following target audiences:</p> <p>Primary/Target Audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Age Students (age 25 and under) • Adult Learners (over 25) <p>Secondary Audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents <p>Other Audiences for Consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Partners by College • Legislators
Phase 2 - We’re thinking that this will represent the positioning that will be developed, and that it will not necessarily	This is correct – it’s not about communicating the ICCMC (this is the operating group); rather, the focus is positioning the community college system and its participating community colleges.

have to communicate "ICCMC" – is that an accurate assumption?	
Phase 2 – Are we right in thinking that the visual representation will be used in two ways – as a mark on its own in support of your organization’s overall marketing efforts, and also as an additional mark or sign-off to the individual marketing efforts that each member school puts forth?	Yes
Phase 3 – Should this plan be a statewide one demonstrating how ICCMC overall should implement its communication strategy? Or are you looking for a plan that will be implemented in part (or in full) by the individual colleges across the state?	We are hopeful that this strategy will include both: 1) A statewide approach to communication and messaging 2) Components of said approach that can be used by individual community colleges across IL
Phase 4 – We’re assuming you’ll be looking to us to handle much of the “campaign implementation” work. For the “social media content” portion of this, should we assume social media will be driven by the ICCMC centrally, or will you be looking for a plan that the individual colleges can contribute to?	Primarily, social media will be driven by the ICCMC centrally. However, as with messaging/communication strategy stated above, there should be key messages with timing that each community college can follow individually to support the broader effort.
Since we don’t know what the Brand Implementation Plan will actually include at this point, we’re planning to provide you with ballpark price ranges for handling the four items listed (video, social media content, scheduling of media, collateral). Is that what you’re looking for?	This approach will be acceptable, as long as there is a “not to exceed” amount with each range. Ideally, we would like each bidder to present an overall project cost, along with a breakdown of cost by phase.
What is the budget we must work within?	Est \$100,000
Is there a need to integrate college brands that already exist with the state brand?	This is more about a statewide identity, which individual colleges can use to complement their own brand.
Is the purpose of this project meant to redefine the entire "system"? Or focus on a strong marketing campaign to impact enrollment for 2021-22?	Dual-goal for both
Is there a state coordinator for this project or will the company be working directly with the colleges to gather this information?	Members of the ICCMC executive committee who represent each region will help coordinate information sharing.
Who or what group will approve the report and accept the recommendations?	Members of the ICCMC executive committee who represent each region