

The Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, on behalf of the Alabama Community College System, invites Alabama advertising/marketing/public relations firms to respond to this request for proposals to create a strategic communications plan and brand identity system.

I. BACKGROUND

The rise of community colleges as an integral part of the nation's educational system was based on an ideal that educational opportunity isn't limited to the elite, but must be available to all who would work hard to advance their dreams. For the Alabama Community College System, the commitment to access is characterized by statewide geographical locations, open enrollment, low-cost tuition, as well as a variety of programs and services that remove barriers to college, education and workforce training.

The System has three primary missions that underlie all college offerings and departmental initiatives:

- Academic transfer to higher-level colleges and universities.
- Adult Education
- Workforce Development

In 2006, the System served 284,368 people, up 44% from 2001. Fifty-five percent of all college undergraduates in public institutions in Alabama attended a two-year college within the System. Other student profile data shows:

- 95% of students are from Alabama.
- The average student is 27.9 years old.
- 59.2% qualify for financial aid.
- 33.03% of students are members of a racial minority, compared to 29% for Alabama's population as a whole; Hispanic enrollment increased by 29 % over the last five years.

Number Served in 2005-2006

• College Credit Courses	128,700
• Noncredit Programs/Courses	64,261
• Adult Education and GED Testing	33,673
• Skills Training Consortia\CITY Skills Program	9,420
• Alabama Firefighters Commission/Alabama Fire College	35,167
• Alabama Industrial Development Training Institute	13,147

In this new organization, Matthew Hughes, director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, reports to Chancellor Bradley Byrne, who now chairs the State Workforce Planning Council. Thomas Surtees, director of the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), co-chairs the group. Also represented in the Council are the Alabama Department of Economic Development and Community Affairs (ADECA), Alabama Development Office (ADO), Alabama Industrial Development Training Institute (AIDT), Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS), Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS); Department of Human Resources (DHR) and State Department of Education (SDE). At-large members include a community college president and two representatives of business and industry.

Ten Regional Workforce Planning Councils throughout the state will be needed for the System to respond to business and industry requests and to forecast and develop employee training for near-term and far-term training needs.

The central challenge of this project will be to create a unified brand for the Alabama Community College System and the new workforce development system it oversees under the authority of the Governor's Office on Workforce Development. The branding effort will be challenged to unify systems that have previously functioned as loose coalitions of largely independently functioning members, while allowing for maximum flexibility and creativity at the local level and with member institutions.

The end result of this project will be the development of a strategic marketing and communications plan and a dynamic and flexible system-wide brand identity system for use in communications products that will recruit, promote, market, and celebrate the System to both internal and external audiences.

The prevailing proposal for this project will conduct the branding research, and to develop the strategic plans and visual identity elements and system based on that research, in consultation with the Alabama Community College System Communications Division director and staff, senior administration, and, when relevant, state governmental and business leaders and other opinion-shapers.

II. SCOPE OF WORK – PROJECT SUMMARY

The Alabama Community College System requires respondents to describe their approach to the following categories of work and the resources and capabilities they would put to use.

Strategic Plan and Brand Identity System

Create a fully integrated, coherent, flexible, strategic communications plan and brand identity system solution that will represent a complex and diverse System. Identify what differentiates the Alabama College System from its peers and articulate a compelling brand identity that inspires the support of its broad range of constituents.

Intentionally use the process to bring members of the System’s “community” together and get to know itself better. Recommend a limited schedule of paid advertising to accomplish strategic goals and objectives (doing so with the knowledge that media dollars are very scarce).

Implementation of the strategic plan, brand identity system and ongoing work will be carried out by the internal staff. The System employs a small Communications Division staff, including a director, assistant director and coordinator who are very busy with a wide range of day-to-day activities and cannot accommodate overly complex, time-consuming additional duties. In developing the visual identity system, its defining elements, and sample applications, the selected firm should work closely and collaboratively with in-house staff to ensure that designs and recommendations can be accommodated within existing limitations of staff workload and budget.

Deliverables:

- Conduct research that incorporates and encourages conversations and connections across the community of stakeholders.
- Redesign/update the System logo. Present at least three alternative design concepts.
- Develop a strategic communications plan and associated visual identity system for the System brand and recommend how it would be extended into all communications media—print and electronic—for the system and its components, programs, centers, and departments. Present at least two alternative design concepts.
 - The visual identity system should be built upon comprehensive design architecture.
 - The visual identity system should explore and recommend the use of color, iconography, typography, visual imagery, texture, shape, composition, grid (with size/format variations), and other defining design elements and visual language for clearly communicating the overall System brand.
 - The visual identity system must provide an immediate understanding of the System’s three core missions:
 - Academic transfer to higher-level colleges and universities.
 - Adult Education
 - Workforce Development
 - The visual identity system should:
 - Provide a solution for distinguishing among the System’s various “sub-brands” while maintaining a strong System identity.
 - Provide a publications architecture and sub-branding structure that supports various organizational levels within the college.

- Illustrate how the new System logo, taglines, and branding guidelines would be represented within the design architecture.
- Demonstrate how the visual identity system could be applied in specific pieces, e.g., template web pages at various levels: System web home page, departmental web home page, pages within a department's site; recommendations for required System logo and identifiers to be used in individual college web sites; print pieces, advertising and other marketing and communications pieces.
- Develop visual identity guidelines in a concise document that summarizes the System's brand identity—its brand essence, key concepts, and guiding principles. The guidelines should also specify, articulate, and depict the defining elements of the visual identity system to be applied throughout all communications.

III. EVALUATION CRITERIA

This request for proposals is limited to Respondents with full-time offices and staff located in the State of Alabama. Minority-owned firms are encouraged to apply. The Respondent selected for an award will be the Respondent whose proposal is the most advantageous to the System. The System is not bound to accept the lowest priced proposal if that proposal is not in the best interests of the System as determined by the System in its sole discretion. Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- 1. Understanding of contract requirements**
 - a. Completeness of response to RFP and agency questionnaire
 - b. Detailed response to each task, including timeframes, deliverables, and costs
- 2. Agency background and range of services available from the agency**
 - a. Demonstrated capability to perform the full spectrum of activities from defining project objectives/parameters to generating design/creative concepts to developing and executing project deliverables
 - b. Demonstrated expertise across multiple communications disciplines including but not limited to branding, identity systems, marketing communications, and Web design
 - c. Ability to adapt agency creative processes and/or proprietary tools to address client's specific needs
- 3. Creative solution capability**
 - a. Demonstrated creativity and strategic thinking
 - b. Demonstrated ability to leverage the power of a brand
 - c. Use of consistent and appropriate brand imagery across all marketing elements
 - d. Integrated on/offline experience and understanding

- e. Customer understanding and focus
- f. Demonstrated experience in designing and implementing comprehensive visual identity systems
- g. Projected project timeline

4. Administrative, management and staffing

- a. Ability to coordinate with System staff on the project
- b. Capability of providing the adequate number and quality of staff members to accomplish tasks in a timely and quality manner
- c. Explanation of whether/how additional vendors would support project work

5. Agency qualifications, experience and references

- a. Ability to provide satisfactory references from similar client institutions/organizations for similar work
- b. Ability to provide satisfactory list of qualifications and professional experience for key staff assigned to this project
- c. Demonstrated industry knowledge
- d. Cultural fit between agency and client
- e. Capability and willingness to provide company financial statements, as requested
- f. Demonstrated financial stability of firm

6. Total cost

- a. Estimates of cost for each deliverable in this Request for Proposal
- b. A “not to exceed” price for each phase of the project

A schedule of out-of-pocket expenses, if applicable

IV. AGENCY QUESTIONNAIRE

Company Information

1. Provide agency’s name, address, Internet URL, telephone and fax numbers. Include name, title and e-mail address of the individual who will serve as agency’s primary contact.
2. Describe agency’s ownership.

Offices

1. Please list full-service agency offices/addresses, leading with the office that would service the account in question.

Clients

1. List top 10 national and/or state clients.
2. List responding office's current clients, indicating each client's tenure with agency.
3. List accounts responding office has gained over the past two years. Provide comment on why agency was chosen for these accounts.
4. List account(s) that responding office has lost or resigned over the past two years. Provide comment on why agency lost or resigned these accounts.

Fiscal Information

1. Respecting policies that prohibit disclosing financial information that is not public or does not comply with G.A.A.P., please provide some evidence of the agency's ability to accommodate the economic requirements associated with this assignment. (This information must be kept confidential.)
2. Please identify the number of clients that the responding office handles in the following billing (client gross marketing expenditures through the agency) ranges:

Billings less than \$500,000

Billings \$500,000 to less than \$1 million

Billings \$1 million and above

3. Provide an approximate percentage breakdown of the responding office's creative output or billings by media type (e.g., network TV, spot/cable TV, magazines, newspapers, radio, outdoor, direct, interactive, etc.), promotion, PR, etc.

Staff

1. Provide a breakout of responding service entity's employees by function: account, creative, planning/research, media, other (please explain).
2. Provide brief biographies of key management executives and key staff who will be working on the business.

Specialized Services

Briefly describe your agency's capabilities in:

1. Direct Marketing
2. Public Relations
3. Interactive
4. Promotion
5. Event Marketing
6. Corporate Imaging

7. Crisis Communications
8. Educational clients
9. Economic Development/Workforce Development
10. Other (specify)

Compensation

1. Please discuss how agency value creation, marketer business results and agency performance can best be incorporated in compensation design and implementation.
2. Please describe your policy with respect to method of compensation.

Strategic Approach

1. Describe the process and methods agency employs to develop effective marketing communications. Provide examples of how this process has worked for clients.

Relevant Experience

1. Describe agency's relevant experience.
2. Provide at least two case histories dealing with similar or analogous issues.
3. In no more than two pages, describe why the agency is ideally suited to address the challenges and opportunities of the account in question.

Creative Samples

Please provide samples of your creative work.

V. SUBMITTING A RESPONSE

(a) Deadline for Submission

Interested parties must submit a proposal no later than 5:00 pm CT on November 26, 2007.

The proposal must be submitted in writing, via e-mail, to:

Martha Simmons

Director, Communications Division

Martha.Simmons@dpe.edu

(b) Proposal Requirements

Proposals should be no more than 30 pages, including creative samples, and must include the following information:

- (i) A completed Agency Questionnaire
- (ii) Samples of comparable work and contact persons who may be contacted for references.
- (iii) A cost proposal. Compensation will be on a fixed fee based on the scope of services provided.

- (iv) A timeline and separate costs for various components.
- (v) A summary work plan describing the Respondent's approach to designing, managing and coordinating the project. The description should include all primary tasks listed in the scope of work for all phases of the project and a tentative schedule.
- (vi) An estimated summary timeline for completion of each phase of the project. This should be realistic as possible since this will be a part of the contractual agreement.

(c) Evaluation and Award Process

The Department of Postsecondary Education will review and evaluate all proposals using its sole judgment and discretion, and make take into account the content of the responses and any other factors in its judgment.

VI. CONTACTS

All respondents with any request for information should contact Martha Simmons at Martha.Simmons@dpe.edu .