

Strategic Communications Plan Request for Proposals (RFP)

The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) seeks an individual consultant/firm to work with ACM and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to create and implement a Strategic Communications Plan for the [Museums for All](#) initiative.

About Museums for All: Museums for All is an initiative of IMLS, a federal agency based in Washington, DC. The initiative is administered by the ACM through a cooperative agreement with IMLS. Open to any type of museum, Museums for All is a national, branded access program that encourages individuals of all backgrounds to visit museums regularly and build lifelong museum habits and learning skills.

The cost of museum admission can be a barrier for many low-income families. Participating museums provide reduced admission, ranging from free to \$3.00, to visitors presenting their EBT card. This reduced rate is available during all normal operating hours to up to four individuals per EBT card. With a year-round open-door policy, Museums for All invites low-income visitors to feel welcome at cultural institutions.

Since its 2014 launch, Museums for All has served more than 6 million visitors nationwide at more than 1,000 museums -representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Museums for All is the only nationally coordinated financial accessibility program in the museum field, providing an easy-to-implement structure and the ability for participating museums to customize their implementation.

The Request: The Strategic Communications Plan consultant will work with ACM and IMLS Communications Team to create and implement a comprehensive marketing and communications plan for Museums for All over the course of three years—2023-2026. The Plan will address, but is not limited to, the following priorities:

- Supporting relationships with relevant federal agencies and aligned national nonprofits through strategies to:
 - Develop appropriate informational material for federal agencies and national nonprofits to disseminate to both organizations directly serving potential Museums for All visitors and the potential visitors themselves.
 - Share information at conferences of several external stakeholders (e.g., National Head Start Association, American Association of SNAP Directors) annually, to be decided on by ACM and IMLS.
- Establishing goals and supporting tactics and resources for use by museums participating in the Museums for All initiative to help them market and communicate effectively in their local communities to reach:
 - The prospective Museum for All visitors in their communities
 - Local public agencies and community partners
 - Potential funders and sponsors
- Strategies to promote recruitment of new museums into Museums for All, which may include:
 - Developing a year-round pipeline communication series to support the Museums for All member participant journey

- Messaging around the value to museums of participating in the initiative, centering promotion of Museums for All as a concrete yet flexible way for museums to begin taking immediate action on their efforts around diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.
 - Pertinent outreach to appropriate museum associations to guide attendance at strategic conferences, and to identify other mechanisms for sharing the program and its impacts targeted to the membership of various museum associations.
 - Development of the means, methods, and messaging to make it easier for participating museums to share the impacts of Museums for All at the local level (e.g. at local, state, regional conferences) to interest new museums in participating.
 - Means for assessing previous recruitment webinars for effectiveness and consistency of messaging, and create a strategy for content and delivery of future recruitment webinars that will increase conversion from webinar participant to Museums for All participating museum.

We anticipate that the project will include working with ACM and IMLS Communications Team to:

- **Research:** Conduct an audit of Museums for All current messaging.
- **Thought Leadership:** Provide thought partnership in service of Museums for All goals that supports development and implementation of strategic communications goals and approaches.
- **Message Development:** Develop a set of strategic communications, narrative strategy, and content creation recommendations/guidelines which you will execute in collaboration with the ACM and IMLS Communications Team. Conduct training on message development if/as appropriate.
- **Infrastructure, Materials & Toolkits:** Create/Guide creation of the necessary infrastructure and tools such as visual and written templates and resources, social media, website, blog, etc.
- **Reporting:** Establish a structure for regular reporting and benchmarking progress.

Project Goals: The Museums for All (M4A) Strategic Communications Plan will ensure the success of the initiative's priorities by achieving the following goals:

1. M4A is best positioned to share stories of impact to increase recruitment of new participating museums.
2. M4A has the support and cooperation of aligned federal government agencies and allied national nonprofit organizations in sharing the initiative with their constituents.
3. M4A has the support and assistance of local and state agencies in sharing the initiative with their clients.
4. M4A better leverages partnerships to expand the reach and impact of the initiative.
5. M4A better serves its participating museums with resources and information they need to leverage their participation to reach and share with their community's residents, officials and local funders.
6. M4A is perceived by key stakeholders, the museum field, and the general public as a credible, transparent, and responsive program that adds value in its communities.

Expectations for Working Together: The consultant/firm must have a practice that is informed by a dedication to equity, inclusion and access, an understanding of equity and inclusion that is integrated into their practice, and they should enjoy working in an environment that privileges collaboration.

Proposal Submission Instructions: Proposals should be no more than 15 pages, not including work samples. Work samples must be included in an appendix of no more than 20 pages. Proposals must be submitted electronically and include:

- Consultant/Company background
 - Brief description of experience
 - Description of previous work with nonprofits and/or public agencies
- Proposed Work Plan
 - Recommended approach for developing the Plan, including methodology of coordinating with Museums for All program manager and team
 - Preliminary thoughts on strategy to achieve project goals
 - Cost/fee structure (inclusive of travel)
- Qualifications
 - Contact information and resume for designated project manager
 - Resume and credentials of members of project team, if applicable
 - References (contact person and phone number) for at least three clients
- Work Samples: Examples of past plans or strategies developed for organizations similar to ACM and/or project similar to Museums for All

Budget: Proposals for the scope of work outlined above must not exceed \$29,900 for the three years. Proposed costs will be an important consideration during review of the RFP submissions.

Timeline: A review committee led by the Museums for All Program Manager and ACM's Director of Communications, along with select staff from ACM and IMLS, will evaluate all proposals. The anticipated timeline for this project, which is subject to change, is as follows:

- Deadline for receipt of proposals: 5:00 pm (EDT), Friday, April 28, 2023
- Interviews: Wednesday, May 10 and/or Friday May 12, 2023
- Consultant selection and contract approval: Friday, May 19, 2023

Selection Criteria:

Methodology

- Project understanding: The consultant understands the scope, goals and requirements of the project, and must be willing to work closely with ACM and IMLS staff.
- Completeness and specificity: The proposal explains what the consultant will do to meet all facets of the project, including coordinating with the project manager and Museums for All team, conducting research, and developing the Plan.
- Identification of needs: The proposal outlines what resources will be required to complete the tasks, including ACM staff time, additional information, etc.

Experience:

- Experience in developing strategic communications plans for nonprofit and/or public agencies. Previous work with museums, arts and cultural organizations, or with nonprofits/government agencies focuses on addressing barriers to access is preferred.
 - Experience on projects that are directly related to the proposed project
 - Project team members' qualifications and work experience

- The selected communications consultant must demonstrate a high degree of expertise in the following areas:
 - Strategic communications planning
 - Marketing strategy
 - Community engagement
 - Social media strategy
 - Media relations
 - Creative services including branding, graphic design, copywriting, and production
- Cost - Fee structure: The proposal must clearly outline the fees and costs to complete all aspects of this project.

Evaluation Process: All proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria.

1. Project Concept and Solutions (30%)
2. Personnel and Organizational Experience, Resources, and Technical Competence to facilitate accomplishment of stated scope of work (30%)
3. Applicable Experience (25%)
4. Total Projected Cost (15%)

Where to Submit Questions and Your Proposal: Email any questions and submit proposals as a .pdf
Brendan Cartwright, Museums for All Program Manager, Brendan.cartwright@childrensmuseums.org.