



Communications Audit Request for Proposals

The American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia (ACLU-VA or ACLU of Virginia) is seeking a public relations consultant or agency to conduct a comprehensive audit of the organization's communications function and programs.

Executive Summary

The ACLU of Virginia seeks to hire a communications consultant or agency to conduct a comprehensive audit of the organization's external communications. This would include a review and analysis of all communications activities and collateral and provision of recommendations for future strategies to align with best industry practices and ensure that communications are being used most effectively to help further the organization's mission of protecting and expanding civil rights and civil liberties in Virginia.

ACLU of Virginia Background

For nearly 50 years, the ACLU-VA has been the Commonwealth's guardian of liberty, working in courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution, federal, and state laws for everyone in Virginia. The ACLU has filed more than 300 lawsuits in Virginia over the last 50 years to advance freedom and equality in the Commonwealth. In addition to the ACLU's robust litigation efforts, we also educate the public, inform the media, lobby legislators, organize grassroots activists, and disseminate information to the community through our membership and volunteers.

The Communications Team within the ACLU-VA works collaboratively with the Legal, Advocacy, Development, and Finance and Administration teams to communicate strategically with external audiences in order to fulfill the affiliate's mission and organizational and policy goals. It utilizes a wide array of tactical delivery mechanisms including traditional media relations, publications, outreach and events, public speaking engagements, and digital and social media to educate, persuade and generate action.

For the foreseeable future, the affiliate is focused on amending the Virginia Constitution to include a guaranteed right to vote, reducing mass incarceration with an eye toward eliminating racial disparities in the legal system, and diversifying its donor and member base to include a younger, more diverse demographic.

Statement of Purpose

This RFP is an invitation to submit offers for provision of an organization-wide audit of external communications resources, strategy and materials to include print, digital, media relations, outreach and events, and other activities. This is being done at a time when the organization is experiencing significant growth in overall personnel – including in the Communications Team – and shifting its focus to incorporate more grassroots efforts in its integrated advocacy, which includes public education, lobbying and litigation.

Scope of Work

Key objectives include:



1. Receiving impartial, constructive feedback on deliverables being produced by the Communications Team and how they might be continued, expanded, adjusted or discarded;
2. Ensuring that the affiliate's communications efforts are aligned with current industry best practices;
3. Reviewing systems and processes used by the Communications Team;
4. Reviewing staffing, resource allocation, and support;
5. Determining strengths and weaknesses in the current environment;
6. Providing recommendations for improvement on all of the above, including how best to measure the quality and effectiveness of inputs, outputs, and outcomes as related to the organizational mission; and
7. Receiving recommendations for adjustments to the communication program based on its two major campaigns – voting rights and Smart Justice – as well as the desire to enhance the affiliate's donor base.

Topics to be reviewed and analyzed in the audit may include but not be limited to:

1. The affiliate's written Communications Policy;
2. Print collateral, including brochures, flyers, mailers, publications, reports, etc.;
3. Digital communications, including social media, website/blog, and email communications, among others;
4. Traditional media relations, including relationships with journalists and news outlets, news releases and conferences, op-eds, story pitching, etc.;
5. Readability of all materials and relevance to audience;
6. Adherence to brand guidelines developed by the national ACLU and adopted by the affiliate;
7. Process for receiving and evaluating requests for speaking engagements, and for pro-actively pitching them;
8. Effectiveness of materials in communicating across racial, cultural and socio-economic lines; and
9. Potential audiences and delivery channels for consideration in communications related to the affiliate's two major campaigns and its development efforts.

Core Competencies

- Understand the ACLU-Virginia's mission and purpose;
- Strong experience and knowledge of current best practices in communications research, planning, implementation and evaluation;
- Depth of knowledge and experience with the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusivity in relation to contemporary communications;
- Reliability and clear, professional, communications, reasonable availability, responsiveness to messages, and adherence to deadlines and commitments;
- Strong leadership ability and willingness to work with the Communications Team, the Senior Leadership Team, Executive Director, DEI Committee, and other staff and board members as necessary throughout the process to formulate analysis and recommendations specific to the ACLU of Virginia.
- Ability to evaluate metrics, climates, data, etc., and make helpful recommendations, both in the short-term and for use in developing long-term goals and plans.

Deliverables



The successful proposal will generate the following deliverables in line with the scope of work and overall purpose of the project:

- Key dates/timelines for project from start to finish;
- A written report covering components outlined above, and others in keeping with best practices which may be recommended by the consultant or agency; and
- Presentation of key findings and recommendations in person or over the phone.

Pricing and Payment Terms

Pricing and payment terms and guidelines include:

- Pricing is on a fixed-fee, per project basis;
- Pricing is inclusive of all incidental expenses;
- No more than 50% will be payable at the outset; and
- No less than 25% will be retained pending completion and final approval of work product.

Proposal Contents

Successful proposal will include the following:

- Clear outline of work and timeline for completion;
- Costs and fees;
- Professional references;
- Examples of successful project or client work;
- Examples of how diversity, equity and inclusivity have been incorporated into previous work;
- Dialogue proposal and facilitation strategy; and
- How you heard about this opportunity.

Evaluation Factors

Diversifying our vendor base is very important to the ACLU of Virginia – we will be evaluating offers based on the following factors as minimum requirements:

- Consultants or firms based in Virginia or those with substantial experience in Virginia;
- Consultants or firms that are minority- or women-owned or operated;
- Credentials of consultants or firms and proven experience working with a wide range of clients, specifically non-profit organizations;
- Experience conducting similar communications audits.

Process Schedule

Schedule for Evaluation Process	
RFP released publicly	Oct. 22, 2019
Vendor question and answer period	Oct. 25-Nov. 1, 2019
Deadline for responses	Nov. 8, 2019
Vendor demonstrations or presentations	Nov. 11, 2019
Selection of vendor and contract negotiation	Nov. 13, 2019

Submission Information



Questions about this request for proposals should be sent to:

Bill Farrar
Director of Strategic Communications
bfarrar@acluva.org

Proposals should be submitted via email by midnight on Nov. 8, 2019.