

**National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS) Request for Proposal –
Strategic Communications**

I. Organization Overview

NASCSP has positioned itself as the premier national association charged with advocating for and enhancing the leadership role of states in preventing and reducing poverty. NASCSP's vision encompasses helping states to empower low-income families to reach self-sufficiency in its broadest context. Through training and technical assistance, NASCSP helps them to utilize state resources effectively to implement an extensive array of services, including weatherization, energy assistance, healthy homes, childcare, nutrition, employment, job training, and housing—within urban, suburban, and rural communities.

NASCSP seeks strategic communications proposals for public relations, communications, and media relations support. To be considered, NASCSP asks for written proposals that meet the needs of our organization as outlined in this Request for Proposals (RFP). Please inform us of your intent to submit a proposal by December 16, 2011. All proposals must be submitted no later than **January 2, 2012**.

II. Division Overview

NASCSP is comprised of the following programmatic divisions:

Energy Services

The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), administered by NASCSP members, was created in 1976 to assist low-income families who lacked resources to invest in energy efficiency. WAP is operated in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Native American tribes, and U.S. Territories. States and local agencies improve the energy efficiency of low-income homes using the most advanced technologies and testing protocols available in the housing industry. The energy conservation resulting from the efforts of state and local agencies helps our country reduce its dependence on foreign oil and decreases the cost of energy for families in need while improving the health and safety of their homes.

NASCSP's Healthy Homes Initiative (HHI) project is operated on behalf of the US Department of Energy. The initiative is a comprehensive approach to combating disease and injury in the home, driven by scientific evidence that links substandard housing and poor health. Healthy Homes interventions take a holistic approach to the coordinated mitigation of housing related hazards, rather than addressing a single hazard at a time. This method allows HHI practitioners to address a wide array of health and safety issues, including lead poisoning, asthma (exacerbated by moisture, mold, and pests), exposure to radon and other toxic chemicals, and injury caused by old or dilapidated housing among myriad others. Several other federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provide funding for Healthy Homes.

CSBG Services

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), administered by the states, provides core funding to local agencies to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families to become self-sufficient. CSBG is a federal, anti-poverty block grant, which funds the operations of a state-administered network of local agencies. This CSBG network consists of more than 1,100 agencies that create, coordinate, and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans in 96 percent of the nation's counties.

The National Alliance for Sustainable Communities (NASC)

NASC is a separate 501c3 organization operating independently from NASCSP. However, NASC is contracting with NASCSP to address communications needs and the successful bidder will assist NASC through NASCSP. NASC believes that security is defined by access to both economic and energy resources. Based on the assumption that any effort to create security must address both factors, the Alliance researches, designs, and evaluates program initiatives with the overall goal to promote and take to scale evidence-based strategies for creating economic security, energy security, and overall environmental sustainability.

III. Scope of Work

NASCSP seeks to contract with a professional company that specializes in communications, framing, and messaging. In developing an overall communications strategy, this project will evaluate and address the needs of the organization as a whole. The goal is to position NASCSP to influence culture, change policies, and educate the public to build synergy around ending poverty and supporting CSBG, WAP, and HHI as high-impact strategies.

Currently, NASCSP has a basic communications strategy that served our previous needs, but as we expand and gain exposure, we need a more sophisticated strategy and the tools to allow us to expand it in the future. Specific CSBG, HHI, and WAP programmatic communications need to be expanded. Presently, each division has its own set of communication tools and branding. However, NASCSP is looking to create a uniform look for all materials and messaging while still meeting the individual needs of each division. NASCSP previously developed a social media presence through the assistance of a communications firm and has maintained and built upon it, though NASCSP is always looking to expand and reach members and partners in new ways.

This project will help us evaluate potential capacity and needs and provide support in areas where NASCSP currently lacks expertise or resources. A successful vendor must demonstrate the ability to both capitalize on and enhance existing resources as well as to grow and expand NASCSP's communication efforts. Our goal is to increase our messages' reach to members, national partners, the Weatherization and CSBG networks, new and potential partners, the media, and legislative and government officials through various communications outlets.

The primary deliverable of this project will be a strategic communications plan including audience identification, frames, media tools, policies, and practices. The successful vendor will provide input on methods, content, and implementation strategy as well as direct assistance in carrying out the strategy for at least three months with the option to extend the retainer for up to 12 months. The strategy must include the use of online tools and new media outlets, including NASCSP's existing social media accounts and our blog.

To ensure appropriate and consistent messaging, the successful vendor will provide the following deliverables:

Comprehensive Organizational Communications Strategy:

- Evaluate current state of communications efforts and develop recommendations and a strategy to further expand and optimize those efforts
- Identify audiences and appropriate frames and messaging
- Develop a series of strong, finely honed messages, including general program/organizational information and advocacy messages, aimed at raising awareness of NASCSP's work among State members, the network, partners, Congress, and the administration
- Outline a comprehensive set of communications activities and project descriptions to be executed by our existing staff or with consultant support
- Provide interactive training for NASCSP staff and potential spokespeople. The focus will be on helping staff understand the strategy, frames, and message and to build consistent communications and teach how to adapt it to suit specific projects
- Advance and build on current NASCSP style guide
- Fuse individual divisions' communications into a uniform NASCSP strategy
- Provide ongoing implementation support for the plan, including assisting NASCSP program staff in the establishment all recommended tools
- Establish promotional and marketing tools and strategy for events and conferences
- Develop marketing for NASC

Social Media Strategy:

- Advance and build on current social media strategy to tie into overall organizational strategy
- Help identify new social media outlets
- Develop blog design, strategy, content, followers, etc.
- Expand online impact through followers, blog posts, responses, connection to other players in the field, etc.
- Help develop conversations and interactions on social media (specifically Facebook) with partners
- Develop NASC's social media presence

Branding Strategy:

- Design one division logo so that it complements the organization's other logos
- Develop a consistent branding strategy to fuse individual divisions' tools and publications
- Design new newsletter and digest templates and provide feedback on general content efficiency and effectiveness

Media Strategy:

- Develop a strategic communications plan to include publications, press releases, handouts, and advocacy campaigns
- Develop a plan to penetrate national and local media outlets, including conducting press conferences and general media events
- Develop a media list, including both print and online media
- Deliver an expanded editorial calendar and detailed work plan for all communications activities, including key dates for outreach

- Provide guidance and training on constructing effective media tools, including:
 - Press releases
 - Media interview talking points
 - Press information and toolkits for local and national media outlets when negative stories break

Long Term Goals:

- NASCSP will develop the skills and resources to take over the communications strategy in-house within six months to a year
- Build public goodwill around poverty and energy sustainability and opportunity (support for CSBG and WAP as specific strategies to achieve that)
- Build recognition for NASCSP’s role with HHI
- Build a step by step marketing strategy for NASC that builds recognition of its role in finding solutions to energy and economic security

IV. Agency Selection Criteria

NASCSP seeks an agency that can help us develop our communications strategy so that it is competitive and current while raising awareness of the issues we support. What NASCSP is looking for in an agency is the following:

- Proven ability to elevate brand awareness
- Knowledge of and experience with nonprofits and federal programs
- Demonstrated understanding of and experience with projects concerning social justice, equity, and/or sustainability
- Excellent reputation and strong relationships within the industry
- Successful editorial coverage in leading business, news, and industry-specific media
- Strong writing skills across multiple media
- Team credentials
- No competitive client conflicts
- Client and press references

This RFP’s compensation range is \$40,000 to \$55,000. If your agency cannot fulfill all that this RFP has laid out within this range, NASCSP encourages your agency to submit a proposal that does fall within this range and outline which deliverables you would be able to fulfill.

Timeline for agency search:

December 5: RFP announced

December 16: Deadline for agencies to provide notification on intent to participate in review (which can be done on the submission and inquiry page)

Jan 2: Completed proposals due to submission and inquiry page by 5:00 p.m. EST

January 6: Agencies notified whether or not they advance to the next round of the review

January 9 – 13: Final team presentations

January 18: Agencies notified of final selection & contracts exchanged

January 25: Kick off meetings and start date for new agency

V. Request for Proposal

Agency Overview

- Provide a company profile, length of time in business, and core competencies and value.
- Please provide a brief overview of your agency philosophy and/or mission.
- Please provide an in-depth list of your agency capabilities/services.
- Describe how your agency differentiates itself from your competitors.
- Briefly describe your firm's project management process and identify key project manager and/or contact.
- Describe how your agency differentiates itself from your competitors.

Client Related Questions

- Please provide a current client list.
- Please list some clients with whom you have had long-term relationships with and detail why the relationship has been successful.
- What is the average term for which a client works with your agency?
- Do you have any clients who might pose a conflict to managing our account?

Account Team Related Questions

- Describe the team structure and how resources would be allocated to us.
- Please provide brief bios for the team you would assign to our account.
- Please provide client references.
- How do you handle staff turnover on accounts and what role do you typically want/allow the client to play in this process?

Industry Experience Related Questions

- Describe your experience within our industry and with membership associations.
- Please provide case studies demonstrating your familiarity with our market.

Budget Related Questions

- How do you bill for services?
- What is your mark-up for project managing other service vendors and/or for out-of-pocket expenses?

Program Related Questions

- Please propose what your agency thinks should be our representative objectives, strategy, and tactics and describe how you would propose to address our general communications needs and the our audiences based on your suggestions.

Miscellaneous Questions

- Describe the firm's practice in starting a new account. What do you do? What do you need/expect us to do?
- Add any additional items you believe are relevant to the management and execution of this program.

VI. Legal Statements

Amendments and Withdrawals

NASCSP reserves the right to amend the RFP or amend the Proposal acceptance closing date.

If NASCSP deems it necessary to amend the RFP, an Addendum will be prepared and issued to all known Proposers. If so instructed in a particular Addendum, Proposers shall be required to sign and attach a copy of the Addendum to their Proposal. If the Proposer has already submitted a Proposal, the Proposer shall modify the proposal as set forth above. NASCSP will provide copies of any Addendum to all known RFP recipients and will advertise the Addendum on the association website, www.nascsp.org along with the original RFP. Any Proposer who has received a copy of this RFP from other than NASCSP will only be alerted to the existence of any Addendum by checking the NASCSP website.

Proposals may be withdrawn at any time prior to the scheduled closing date for the receipt of proposals. This can be accomplished by written notification signed by an authorized representative. This notice may be delivered in person or mailed. NASCSP will not be responsible for any costs associated with returning withdrawn Proposals. If the Proposer chooses to pick up the Proposal in person, appropriate identification and the requisite notification must be presented before NASCSP will release the Proposal.

Compliance

It is the Proposers' responsibility to comply with all laws, codes, regulations and insurance requirements applicable to the operation of their business. NASCSP accepts no liability for the actions of the contractor and his or her employee(s) or subcontractors during the term of this contract.

Performance of Work

The Proposer will be required to assume responsibility for all services outlined and finalized in the Contract, whether the contractor, a representative or subcontractor produces them. NASCSP considers the Proposer responsible for any and all contractual matters, including performance of work and the stated deliverables.

Method of Consideration

Payment will be based on a fee for specified deliverables. The anticipated tasks and deliverables are described in the Scope of Work and Deliverables portion of the RFP. The selected Proposer and NASCSP may negotiate the final description of work tasks, deliverables and specific terms and conditions of the Contract, within the scope of what is advertised here for inclusion in the resulting Contract.

Out of Scope Work

For changes or additions to the project that are deemed out of scope by the Proposer, NASCSP and the Proposer must agree in writing to the change/addition in advance of the modification.

Right of Ownership

All materials, information, processes and outputs resulting from the work of contractor under agreement with NASCSP shall be the sole property of NASCSP and may not be used by anyone else for any reason except with the written permission of the National Association for State Community Services Programs.

VII. Contact Information

To submit your proposal or your intent to submit a proposal, ask a question about this RFP, and/or request more information, please visit NASCSP's RFP submission and inquiry page at <http://www.nascsp.org/About-NASCSP/775/Request-for-Proposal.aspx?iHt=6>.