

Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association Request for Proposals for Media and Public Relations Consultant

I. INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association (LACERA) invites proposals from experienced professionals in response to this Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide media and public relations services to LACERA, its governing Board of Retirement and Board of Investments, and staff. The selected respondent will partner with LACERA to effectively communicate the organization's message, priorities, and successes to the media and other stakeholders on a wide variety of issues and initiatives, and thereby enhance public understanding and appreciation of the organization. The services involve both development and implementation of an overall strategic communications plan and assistance in planning and messaging for specific issues as they arise on an ongoing basis.

LACERA is a defined benefit public pension fund established to administer retirement benefits to employees of the County of Los Angeles and other participating agencies. LACERA operates as an independent governmental entity separate and distinct from Los Angeles County. LACERA has approximately 425 dedicated employees to administer pension benefits for active, deferred, and retired members, oversee the County's retiree health benefits program, and manage the fund's investments. As of June 30, 2019, LACERA managed approximately \$58.3 billion in fund assets to support the pensions of over 174,000 members, including over 66,000 benefit recipients. LACERA's annual pension benefits payments to its retirees total approximately \$3 billion.

Our members rely upon LACERA to provide a secure and dignified lifetime retirement at the conclusion of their careers of public service to the people of Los Angeles County in many different general and safety positions that support the community. LACERA is the largest county pension system in the United States, the fourth largest public system in California, and one of the largest public pensions at any level in the country. LACERA is both a member service organization serving its members, and a financial institution investing its assets for the long term to provide for our members and their beneficiaries. The successful respondent will have an appreciation for and the knowledge and experience to assist both aspects of LACERA's business.

LACERA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the designated spokesperson for the system on general pension issues. The Chief Investment Officer (CIO), who oversees a team of over 40 financial professionals responsible for implementation of the fund's strategic asset allocation, speaks for LACERA on investment issues.

LACERA has an internal Communications Division of 13 experienced staff. The Division creates and communicates essential retirement information to LACERA members and staff. They apply innovative thinking, contemporary advertising and marketing practices, and technology to promote LACERA-wide solutions. LACERA's Member Services, Benefits, Disability Retirement Services, Quality Assurance Division, and Retiree Health Care Divisions collectively include over 240 staff. They provide world-class service and education to members with kindness, care, and empathy and ensure the timely and accurate delivery of

benefits. The balance of LACERA's staff provides financial and accounting, legal, internal audit, systems, human resources, and other necessary administrative services and support to the organization to further its effective operations.

LACERA's stakeholders include: our plan sponsor, the County of Los Angeles; other participating agencies; active, deferred, and retired members; LACERA's employees; and the public. LACERA emphasizes transparency, accountability, and values of good communication and positive relationships with our stakeholders. The successful proposer will work on an ongoing basis primarily in collaboration with and under the oversight of the CEO and other Executive Office staff, the CIO, Chief Counsel, and the Communications Division, including any internal Public Information Officer that may be hired, plus other personnel as needed. The selected firm will also present to LACERA governing Boards when appropriate.

LACERA'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Mission: To Produce, Protect, and Provide the Promised Benefits

Vision: Excellence, Commitment, Trust, and Service

Values: Professionalism, Respect, Open Communication, Fairness, Integrity, and Teamwork (PROFIT)

LACERA'S GOVERNING BOARDS

Board of Retirement (BOR) – This nine-trustee Board, with two alternates, is responsible for the overall management of the retirement system. Under the policy guidance of the BOR, LACERA strives to create innovative ways to streamline and expedite retirement processes, integrate new technologies, and introduce new member services options and upgrades.

Board of Investments (BOI) – This nine-trustee Board is responsible for establishing LACERA's investment policy and objectives, and overseeing the investment management of the fund. The BOI diversifies fund investments to maximize the rate of return and minimize the risk of loss; the Board also oversees actuarial services to assist in the setting of employer and employee contributions to assure the long-term safety of LACERA's assets.

The two Boards share joint responsibility for LACERA's budget, personnel classifications and compensation, and certain other issues. The Boards, and their trustees, have a fiduciary duty of prudence and loyalty to administer the system to assure the prompt delivery of benefits and related services to members and beneficiaries. The successful respondent will serve the interests of both Boards in effective media and public relations concerning LACERA.

The Boards each include trustees elected by active general and safety members and retirees, trustees appointed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and the County Treasurer and Tax Collector, who sits ex officio on both Boards. This balanced and diverse composition of the Boards ensures a broad range of perspectives.

For additional information about LACERA, respondents are encouraged to access the resources available on LACERA.com.

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II. SCOPE OF SERVICES, DELIVERABLES, AND REQUIRED CORE SKILLS

LACERA seeks to hire a media and public relations consultant to provide advice and services related to the full range of LACERA's operations and governance, including strategic planning as well as responses to immediate issues that may arise during the course of LACERA's operations. As used in this Request for Proposals, "media" refers to all channels of local, state, national, and international media, including but not limited to print, television and radio, and social media platforms. The responsibilities and deliverables of the consultant include the following:

- A. Analyze and evaluate existing and anticipated media and public relations issues facing the organization and its Boards.
- B. Develop proactive messaging consistent with LACERA's Mission, Vision, and Values in the interest of transparency, good relationships, and communication to promote understanding and appreciation of LACERA's achievements and to further LACERA's standing, visibility, and positive profile in the media and with stakeholders.
- C. Provide oral and written advice to the Board of Retirement, Board of Investments, and/or staff regarding media and public relations issues.
- D. Monitor, track, and keep the Boards and staff immediately informed of all media concerning LACERA or issues that may relate to LACERA or its business.
- E. Make direct contact with media and stakeholder groups as needed, and counsel the LACERA Boards and staff in connection with contacts they may have with the media and stakeholders.
- F. Prepare and review media releases, statements, communications, and presentations to the media and stakeholder groups.
- G. Prepare strategic media and public relations planning documents and work plans.
- H. Maintain regular oral and written communications with the Boards and staff concerning media and public relations issues.
- I. Respond to immediate or short-term media inquiries, and develop proactive plans for immediate needs and circumstances as they occur.
- J. Review and coordinate member communication documents with, and provide talking points for, LACERA staff, including but not limited to Communications, Member Services, and Retiree Health Care Divisions, regarding media content to ensure consistency across media and member communication channels.
- K. Collaborate with other LACERA professionals, including but not limited to auditors, actuaries, counsel, and investment consultants, to obtain and share knowledge or address particular LACERA issues.
- L. Assist in other media and public relations issues, as requested.

Core skills include: comprehensive knowledge, understanding, and experience in media and public relations services and issues for member service organizations and financial institutions, including public pensions if available; contacts and relationship-building with media and stakeholder groups; strategic planning skills; ability to provide immediate advice and assistance when required; professional oral and written communication skills; sound judgment; the ability to work well with and maintain the confidence of the Board of Retirement, the Board of Investments, and staff; and the ability to deliver services in a timely and cost effective manner.

Respondents, including the lead consultant committed to provide services to LACERA, must have at least ten (10) years providing media and public relations services to public and private member service organizations and financial institutions. Experience in advising other public pension systems is desirable.

III. RFP PROCESS

This RFP and other relevant information related to the RFP, including addenda, modifications, answers to questions, and other updates, will be posted on the RFPs page of LACERA.com. Additional background information about LACERA may also be found on LACERA.com.

A. Calendar, Expected but Subject to Change

Issuance of RFP	June 2, 2020
Written Questions and Requests for Clarification Due	July 10, 2020
Responses to Questions Posted	July 15, 2020
Proposals Due	July 24, 2020
Finalist Interviews	August 2020 To be Determined
Estimated Final Selection and Approval by the Boards	September 2020 To be Determined

B. Communication and Questions

Respondents are encouraged to communicate any questions regarding this RFP by the deadline stated above in the RFP Calendar. Questions should be sent in writing only via email to Steven P. Rice, Chief Counsel, at srice@lacera.com. Questions and answers will be posted at LACERA.com by the date stated in the RFP Calendar.

C. Errors in the RFP

If a respondent discovers an ambiguity, conflict, discrepancy, omission or other error in this RFP, notice should be immediately provided to srice@lacera.com. LACERA is not responsible for, and has no liability for or obligation to correct, any errors or omissions.

D. Addenda

Modifications or clarifications of the RFP, if deemed necessary, will be made by addenda to the RFP and posted on LACERA.com.

E. Delivery of Submissions

Submissions must be delivered in PDF format via email to srice@lacera.com by the due date stated above in the RFP Calendar. In addition, respondents must send three (3) hard copies of their submissions for delivery by the due date stated in the RFP Calendar addressed to:

LACERA
Attention: Steven P. Rice
Chief Counsel
300 North Lake Avenue, Suite 620
Pasadena, CA 91101

See the Notice Regarding the California Public Records Act and Brown Act in Section IV.B of this RFP for information regarding redactions and disclosure.

F. Proposal Format and Content

All responses to this RFP should follow the format described in this Section III.F. When requested, please provide details and state all qualifications or exceptions. All information provided should be concise and clearly relevant to the qualifications to serve as LACERA's media and public relations consultant.

Cover Letter

The cover letter must provide a statement affirming that the signatory is empowered and authorized to bind the respondent to an engagement agreement with LACERA and represents and warrants that the information stated in the proposal is accurate and may be relied upon by LACERA in considering, and potentially accepting, the proposal.

Executive Summary

In this section, an overview should be provided of the respondent's background, experience, and other qualifications to serve as LACERA's media and public relations consultant, and respondent's approach to providing services to LACERA.

Experience and Approach

The proposal must provide a detailed statement of the respondent's experience in providing media and public relations services to public and private sector member service and financial institutions, including, if applicable, other public pension systems. The response should keep in mind the evaluation criteria stated in Section III.I. LACERA's goal in the RFP process is to obtain an understanding of each respondent's experience across the full spectrum of media and public relations issues that may arise in the representation of LACERA and the type of work and working relationship LACERA can expect from the respondent. Examples of

strategic media planning work as well as recommendations for immediate or short-term client needs should be included.

LACERA is interested in a respondent's experience and approach in analyzing such issues, interfacing with trustees and staff, and communicating with the media and other stakeholders. LACERA is also interested in how the respondent differentiates themselves from other consultants offering similar services.

LACERA encourages respondents to provide written samples of relevant work product, which may be redacted as deemed appropriate.

Assigned Professionals

The proposal must state the name of the lead consultant and all other professional staff expected to be assigned to LACERA work, including a detailed profile of each person's background and relevant individual experience and the ability of the professionals collectively to function together as a team and also to work effectively with LACERA's Boards and staff in performing the scope of services. Diversity is a core LACERA value, and therefore the proposal must specifically address the diversity of the proposed team members in meaningful roles across levels of seniority to support the firm's work for LACERA. LACERA expects that this section of the response will only include those persons committed to supporting LACERA and investing in a relationship with LACERA on a regular and long-term basis. The proposal should include a commitment by the lead consultant to be reasonably available to LACERA on an ongoing basis.

With respect to diversity, the response must include a description of diversity policies, practices, and procedures maintained by the firm regarding equal employment opportunity, including the recruitment, development, retention, and promotion of a diverse and inclusive workforce, non-discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, veteran's status, and other legally protected categories, and prohibition of sexual harassment in the workplace. If the respondent has written policies, a copy should be provided with the response to this RFP. The response should identify the oversight, monitoring, and other compliance processes for implementation and enforcement of the firm's diversity policies, practices, and procedures, including the name of the person who is responsible for oversight the firm's method to measure the effectiveness of the policies, and conclusions as to effectiveness. Please describe any judicial, regulatory, or other legal finding, formal action, or claims related to equal employment opportunity, workplace discrimination, or sexual harassment during the past ten (10) years.

References

In this section, the proposal must identify as references at least five (5) public and private member service organizations and financial institutions, including, if available, public pension systems, for which the respondent provided media and public relations services in the last five years. Each reference should include an individual point of contact, the length of time the respondent served as consultant, and a summary of the work performed and successes achieved.

Fees and Costs, Billing Practices, and Payment Terms

The respondent must explain the pricing proposal for the scope of work including pricing of fees and costs, billing practices, and payment terms that would apply assuming a five (5) year initial duration of the engagement. LACERA does not place any limits on the approach to pricing and is open to presentation of more than one pricing option for the scope of work, or portions of it. This section of the response should include an explanation as to how the pricing approach(es) will be managed to provide the best value to LACERA. The respondent should represent that the pricing offered to LACERA is, and will remain, equivalent to or better than that provided to other governmental clients, or should provide an explanation as to why this representation cannot be provided. All pricing proposals should be “best and final,” although LACERA reserves the right to negotiate on pricing.

Conflicts of Interest

The proposal must identify all actual or potential conflicts of interest that the respondent may face in providing media and public relations services to LACERA. Specifically, and without limitation to other actual or potential conflicts, the proposal should identify any representation of the County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Office of Education, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, Little Lake Cemetery District, and Local Agency Formation Commission, and, to the respondent’s knowledge, any of LACERA’s members, vendors, other contracting parties, investments or investment managers, and employees. The proposal should identify any potential positional conflicts of which the respondent is aware. The proposal should explain how conflicts that may arise during the course of the representation will be addressed and what steps will be taken to assure the respondent’s ability to vigorously and creatively advise LACERA and represent its positions and interests without limitations.

Claims

The proposal must identify all past, pending, or threatened litigation, including any claims against the firm and the personnel proposed to provide services to LACERA.

Insurance

The proposal must explain the insurance that the respondent will provide with respect to the services to be provided and other acts or omission of the firm and its personnel in the representation of LACERA. The limits of liability are a material term of any engagement letter with the firm and may be subject to negotiation.

Other Information

The proposal may contain any other information that the respondent deems relevant to LACERA’s selection process, including as noted above written samples of relevant work product or other other media, such as, for example, on camera work, reflective of the respondent’s work and efforts.

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G. Post-Proposal Request for Information

LACERA reserves the right in its discretion to request additional information from any respondent, although such requests may not be made to all respondents.

H. Interviews and Personal Presentations

LACERA intends to require one or more interviews with or personal presentations by finalists to be conducted with staff and members of the Boards. The lead consultant must attend the interviews, as well as other team members that will support LACERA.

I. Evaluation Criteria

Respondents will be evaluated at the discretion of LACERA based upon the following factors:

1. Experience providing media and public relations services to public and private member service organizations and financial institutions in strategic planning and in response to specific issues as they arise with the general and financial press and LACERA's stakeholder groups. The nature and depth of existing connections, relationships, and interactions with and access to relevant media is highly relevant. Specific experience in representing public pension systems should be included, if available. The relevance of all stated experience to representation of LACERA should be explained.
2. Quality of the team proposed to provide services to LACERA, based on experience, contacts and relationships, diversity, insights, creativity, and success.
3. Ability to provide focused, professional, and responsive services in a timely manner in both strategic planning assignments and time-sensitive situations that can be expected to arise, including the availability of the lead consultant and other team members on an immediate basis when needed.
4. Information provided by references.
5. Written and oral communications skills, including written materials and other samples of work, such as, for example, on camera work, demonstrating such skills, if provided.
6. Pricing and value.
7. Team work, both internally and with LACERA's Boards and staff. LACERA seeks a highly collaborative relationship with the successful respondent.
8. Level of investment and commitment to the LACERA relationship.
9. The organization, completeness, and quality of the proposal, including cohesiveness, conciseness, and clarity.

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The factors will be considered as a whole, without a specific weighting. The balancing of the factors is in LACERA's sole discretion. Factors other than those listed may be considered by LACERA in making its selection.

J. Engagement Agreement

LACERA will negotiate an engagement agreement with the successful respondent, which must contain such terms as LACERA in its sole discretion may require. The agreement will be submitted to the Boards for approval.

IV. GENERAL CONDITIONS

This RFP is not an offer to contract. Acceptance of a proposal neither commits LACERA to award a contract to any respondent even if all requirements stated in this RFP are met, nor does it limit LACERA's right to negotiate the terms of an engagement agreement in LACERA's best interest, including requirement of terms not mentioned in this RFP. LACERA reserves the right to contract with a vendor for reasons other than lowest price.

Failure to comply with the requirements of this RFP may subject the proposal to disqualification. However, failure to meet a qualification or requirement will not necessarily subject a proposal to disqualification.

Publication of this RFP does not limit LACERA's right to negotiate for the services described in this RFP. If deemed by LACERA to be in its best interests, LACERA may negotiate for the services described in this RFP with a party that did not submit a proposal. LACERA reserves the right to choose to not enter into an agreement with any of the respondents to this RFP.

A. Quiet Period

To ensure that prospective service providers responding to this RFP have equal access to information regarding the RFP and that communications related to the RFP are consistent and accurate so that the selection process is efficient and fair, a quiet period will be in effect from the date of issuance of this RFP until the search has been completed. During the quiet period, respondents are not permitted to communicate with any LACERA staff member or Board member regarding this RFP except through the point of contact named herein. Respondents violating the quiet period may be disqualified at LACERA's discretion. Respondents who are existing LACERA service providers must limit their communications with LACERA staff and Board members to the subject of the existing services provided.

B. Notice Regarding the California Public Records Act and Brown Act

The information submitted in response to this RFP will be subject to public disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act (California Government Code Section 6250, et. seq.) and the Brown Act (California Government Code Section 54950, et seq.) (collectively, the Acts). The Acts provide generally that records relating to a public agency's business are open to public inspection and copying and that the subject matter of this RFP is a matter for public open session discussion by the Boards, unless specifically exempted under one of several exemptions set forth in the Acts. If a respondent believes that any portion of its proposal is exempt from public disclosure or discussion under the Acts, the respondent must provide a full explanation and mark such portion "TRADE SECRETS," "CONFIDENTIAL," or

“PROPRIETARY,” and make it readily separable from the balance of the response. Proposals marked “TRADE SECRETS,” “CONFIDENTIAL,” or “PROPRIETARY” in their entirety will not be honored, and LACERA will not deny public disclosure of all or any portion of proposals so marked.

By submitting a proposal with material marked “TRADE SECRETS,” “CONFIDENTIAL,” or “PROPRIETARY,” a respondent represents it has a good faith belief that the material is exempt from disclosure under the Acts; however, such designations will not necessarily be conclusive, and a respondent may be required to justify in writing why such material should not be disclosed by LACERA under the Acts.

LACERA will use reasonable means to ensure that material marked “TRADE SECRETS,” “CONFIDENTIAL,” or “PROPRIETARY” is safeguarded and held in confidence. LACERA will not be liable, however, for disclosure of such material if deemed appropriate in LACERA’s sole discretion. LACERA retains the right to disclose all information provided by a respondent.

If LACERA denies public disclosure of any materials designated as “TRADE SECRETS,” “CONFIDENTIAL,” or “PROPRIETARY,” the respondent agrees to reimburse LACERA for, and to indemnify, defend and hold harmless LACERA, its Boards, officers, fiduciaries, employees and agents from and against:

1. Any and all claims, damages, losses, liabilities, suits, judgments, fines, penalties, costs and expenses, including without limitation attorneys’ fees, expenses and court costs of any nature whatsoever (collectively, Claims) arising from or relating to LACERA’s non-disclosure of any such designated portions of a proposal; and
2. Any and all Claims arising from or relating to LACERA’s public disclosure of any such designated portions of a proposal if LACERA reasonably determines disclosure is deemed required by law, or if disclosure is ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction.

If LACERA staff recommend any respondent to the Boards for hiring, such recommendation, the reasons for the recommendation, and the relevant proposal(s) will appear on a publicly posted agenda and in supporting materials for public meetings of the Boards.

C. Reservations by LACERA

In addition to the other provisions of this RFP, LACERA reserves the right to:

1. Change or cancel this RFP, in whole or in part, at any time.
2. Make such investigation as it deems necessary to determine the respondent’s ability to furnish the required services. The respondent agrees to furnish all such information for this purpose as LACERA may request.
3. Reject the proposal of any respondent who is not currently in a position to perform the contract, or who has previously failed to perform similar contracts properly, or in a timely manner, or for any other reason in LACERA’s sole discretion.

4. Waive irregularities, to negotiate in any manner necessary to best serve the public interest, and to make a whole award, multiple awards, a partial award, or no award.
5. Award a contract, if at all, to the firm which will provide the best match to the requirements of the RFP and the service needs of LACERA in LACERA's sole discretion, which may not be the proposal offering the lowest fees.
6. Reject any or all proposals submitted in response to this RFP.
7. Determine the extent, without limitation, to which the services of a successful respondent are or are not actually utilized.

D. Ownership of Proposals

The information that a respondent submits in response to this RFP becomes the exclusive property of LACERA. LACERA will not return any proposal or reimburse proposal preparation expenses.

E. Valid Period of Proposal

The pricing, terms, conditions, and other information stated in each proposal must remain valid for 120 days from the date of delivery of the proposal to LACERA.

F. Cost of Proposal

LACERA shall not be liable for any costs that respondents incur in connection with the preparation or submission of a proposal.