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Request for Proposal (RFP) Communications Services

RFP Release Date: November 30, 2015

OVERVIEW

National Industries for the Blind (NIB) requests a proposal describing your company's ability to provide a variety of communications and media relations services. These services are needed supplement and support the activities of NIB's communications team in the following areas:

- Crisis and Issues management
- Media relations / media outreach
- Message development and strategic positioning
- Communications campaign planning
- Digital communications / online reputation management

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

NIB's mission is to enhance the opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment. NIB and its nationwide network of associated nonprofit agencies are the nation's largest employer of people who are blind. NIB delivers best value solutions—affordable, high quality products and services tailored to customer requirements—all while helping people who are blind build meaningful careers.

For additional background, we encourage potential agencies to view our corporate video, "We're Ready," at the following link: <http://www.nib.org/videos>.

NIB Associated Nonprofit Agencies

NIB works with a nationwide network of independent, nonprofit agencies that employ people who are blind. Currently there are **95** nonprofit agencies associated with NIB, located in 38 states and Washington D.C. NIB provides technical, operational, marketing and business development services to its associated, community-based nonprofit agencies.

The AbilityOne Program

NIB operates under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act, the authorizing legislation for the AbilityOne Program. The AbilityOne Program is a federal purchasing program established in 1938 to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities through the provision of products and services to federal customers. Today, more than 45,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities work as part of the AbilityOne Program.

The JWOD Act requires federal government agencies to purchase certain products and services produced by people who are blind or have significant disabilities. NIB administers the products and services provided by nonprofit agencies employing people who are blind, while SourceAmerica administers the products and services provided by people with significant disabilities. NIB and SourceAmerica are designated as "Central Nonprofit Agencies."

Fast Facts

NIB and its associated nonprofit agencies:

- Employed 5,602 people who are blind in FY2014
- Employed 4,095 people who are blind in FY2014 as part of the AbilityOne® Program
- Created 395 new job opportunities for people who are blind in FY2014
- Paid more than \$106 million in wages and benefits for employees who are blind in FY2014
- Paid an average hourly rate of \$10.72 in FY2014
- Offered rehabilitative services to 146,406 people who are blind nationwide in FY2014
- Operate 152 Base Supply Center stores on military and federal government facilities
- Produce 7,000+ different products, including 5,000+ SKILCRAFT® products

KEY STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Myths and Misconceptions

Seven out of ten working age Americans who are blind are not employed. There continues to be misconceptions about the capabilities of people who are blind in the workplace. NIB is focused on changing those misconceptions to build meaningful careers for people who are blind. With the evolution of accessible technology, there are very few jobs a person who is blind cannot perform. Read NIB's press release about a survey of hiring managers for additional background:

<http://www.nib.org/media/press-releases/national-industries-blind-marks-75-years-creating-employment-opportunities>.

Federal Government Compliance

The federal government comprises the majority of NIB's sales and employment. However, many federal customers are unaware of the JWOD requirement, and unknowing violate the law by purchasing commercially available products instead of mandatory AbilityOne products. This negatively impacts NIB's ability to create and sustain employment for people who are blind. NIB must continue to educate federal government customers on the value and positive impact of the

AbilityOne Program, while reminding them of the statutory requirement to purchase AbilityOne products instead of commercial equivalents.

KEY AUDIENCES

- Federal government customers
 - Senior-level decision makers
 - Contracting officers and acquisition professionals
 - Purchase card holders
 - End-users (could be any of the above, or not)
- Elected officials and their staffs
- NIB associated nonprofit agencies
- Disability community and other organizations serving people who are blind (e.g., National Federation of the Blind, American Council of the Blind, American Foundation for the Blind)
- Hiring managers
- General public

SCOPE OF WORK

The agency will serve as an extension of the NIB communications team to execute a variety of proactive and reactive communications activities. Specific areas of support include:

Crisis and issues management / communications. Advise the NIB president and CEO, as well as other NIB leaders, on urgent and/or sensitive communications issues. Develop recommended courses of action, and help NIB develop responses to media inquiries as needed.

Strategic advisory services. Advise the NIB president and CEO on a variety of communications issues. Craft recommend approaches of how to position and message issues relevant to NIB and its associated agencies, pros and cons particular media strategies, etc.

Media relations. Secure media coverage in various national-level outlets and trade publications (e.g., Government Executive) to help differentiate NIB in the marketplace in a positive, controlled manner. Develop media briefs and other preparatory material for NIB leadership participation in interviews. Media briefs to include key messages, potential Q&A, reporter background, etc. Develop press releases for NIB announcements as needed.

Message development. Develop key messages for multiple audiences, including “core” messaging relevant to a wide variety of engagements, and tailored, targeted messaging specific to a particular engagement.

Associated nonprofit agency support. Develop toolkits and other materials to support outreach efforts of NIB associated agencies for particular annual campaigns, such as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), key anniversaries, and other milestones. Toolkits include key messages, tips for reaching out to reporters, sample press releases and media advisories, etc.

Digital communications / online reputation management. Develop and support NIB’s social media strategy, including creation of original content and strategies to increase engagement on key online such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Please provide the following information in response to this RFP.

1) Company Overview

Provide an overview of your organization, including:

- Name and location of your organization
- Location of the office that will be serving NIB
- Number of years your company has been in business
- Brief, general description of your business, including the primary area of specialization
- Experience working with nonprofits
- Is your company a subsidiary of another corporation? If so, what is the name of the parent company?

2) Past Performance

Provide specific examples of relevant work, including:

- Media relations – securing media coverage in federal government, military and commercial publications (e.g., Government Executive, Military Times, USA Today, WTOP.com)
- Message development and strategic positioning
- Crisis communications
- Communications campaign planning

Provide specific reference information for three clients you have recently served, relevant to the work proposed, to include:

- The name, location and contact reference of the client
- The date range of services provided
- A detailed description of the type of work performed. Include specific examples of how your firm’s efforts led to success for these clients.

3) Staffing Plan

Provide a detailed staffing plan, including:

- List of staff members who will be supporting NIB.

- Description of each staff members' qualifications, experience, and areas of expertise
- Description of each staff members' role on the NIB account

4) Management Plan

Describe how your company will manage tasks and deliverables, including:

- How deliverables will be tracked
- How project status will be reported to the NIB Communications Team
- A description of the firm's availability to participate in meetings with NIB staff in the Alexandria, Virginia area

5) Fee Structure and Cost

Describe your proposed billing model and costs, including:

- A description of how your organization will charge NIB for these services (i.e., fixed price, monthly retainer, and/or hourly rate)
- Schedule of fees
- A description of how incidental costs will be billed
- **Overall estimate of fees**

VENDOR SELECTION

Proposals should be emailed to Mike Johnson, NIB communications program director, at mjohnson@nib.org.

Hard copies can be mailed to the following address:

Mike Johnson
National Industries for the Blind
1310 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Proposals must be received by 5:00 PM (ET) Friday, January 15, 2016.

RFP SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

RFP Release: November 30, 2015

Deadline for questions: December 11, 2015

Responses circulated among all submitters: December 18, 2015

RFP submittal deadline: January 15, 2016

Notification to finalists: January 22, 2016

Interviews for finalists: February 2016

Work begins: No later than March 1, 2016

QUESTIONS ON RFP

Written questions regarding the RFP should be directed to Mike Johnson by email only at mgjohnson@nib.org. **The deadline for questions is Friday, December 11, 2015, at 5:00 PM (ET).** Responses to all inquiries will be shared with all agencies. No phone questions will be accepted or answered.

TERM OF CONTRACT

The initial term of any contract resulting from this RFP will commence 30 days after announcement of the award and would last for a one-year period. The parties thereto shall have the option to extend the contract on a month-to-month basis. Said option to extend will only be exercised upon satisfactory performance and by mutual consent of both parties. The fee schedule in any such extension option shall be based upon the original proposal plus any adjustments consistent with the Consumers Price Index for the preceding calendar year and be subject to final negotiations between both parties.

If relevant, provide sample documents required by your company for the execution of a contract resulting from award of this proposal. Any resultant contract award shall incorporate the contents of this RFP as well as the awarded vendor's response. Please note that all proposals should include any applicable warranties of service, and should also include proposed language for termination procedures. Termination procedures shall include the following statement: "NIB reserves the right to cancel the agreement without cause, within 30 days of written notice."