



SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Request for Proposal for Public Relations Campaign Raise National Visibility

Southwestern University is requesting qualified vendors to submit proposals to provide public relations, media relations, brand building, and related services in accordance with the specifications described below. Within this Request for Proposal (hereinafter referred to as RFP) are instructions for submitting the proposal, the evaluation and award criteria by which an agency (Vendor) will be selected, and the contractual terms that will govern the relationship between the College and the selected Vendor. The terms and conditions contained in this RFP will govern the performance of any contract resulting from this solicitation. Proposals submitted shall remain in effect a minimum of 45 days from the RFP due date. Responses to the RFP must conform to the format provided in this document.

Background

Southwestern University is a selective undergraduate liberal-arts institution located in Georgetown, Texas, 28 miles north of downtown Austin. Established in 1840 as the first university in the Southwest and affiliated with the United Methodist Church, Southwestern enrolls approximately 1,500 students and maintains a student–faculty ratio of 12 to 1. The university provides a highly interdisciplinary and holistic education while supporting high-impact learning experiences, such as internships and undergraduate research. Approximately 70% of our students volunteer in the community, and the Pirates compete in 20 NCAA Division III intercollegiate sports. A member of the recently formed Liberal Arts Colleges Racial Equity Leadership Alliance, Southwestern is committed to fostering a diverse educational environment and encourages applications from members of groups traditionally underrepresented in academia. Additional information about the university can be found at our website: www.southwestern.edu.

For the past year and a half, Southwestern University, along with the rest of higher education, faced immense challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in an immediate transition to online and hybrid courses at an institution that prides itself on immersive learning and high-impact cocurricular experiences. A flagging economy alongside mass unemployment caused enormous stress for hard-working Americans, including the families of Southwestern community members. An ice storm that paralyzed the state in February brought a weeklong pause to classes and campus activity while staff worked overtime to restore power and communicate to worried parents. Despite these unprecedented obstacles, Southwestern maintained its commitment to providing a world-class education for its bright, motivated undergraduates. To that end, we celebrated record enrollment, higher student retention, 70% of classes offered in person, all 20 of our athletic teams competing in the spring, and a sizable year-end surplus. While expertly managing the external crisis, members of the Southwestern community came together to create the 2021–2026 Tactical Plan, an exciting vision for the University’s institutional priorities:



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offering an unparalleled liberal-arts education for our students, embracing and valuing all of our community members, and envisioning an exceptional living and learning environment.

Led by cochairs Laura E. Skandera Trombly—in her first year as Southwestern’s 16th president—and Bob Bednar, professor of communication studies and chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, the Tactical Planning Task Force (TPTF) comprised 20 members, with student, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustee representatives. Between September 2020 and April 2021, the group met virtually 23 times, including two half-day retreats. Members solicited suggestions from Southwestern community members; a total of 236 recommended priorities were submitted, evidencing campus-wide enthusiasm for the plan.

Advancing all of the work outlined in the Tactical Plan, especially in raising the national visibility of Southwestern, is a primary focus of the University’s Office Marketing and Communications (MarCom) for the next five years. MarCom is seeking an agency partner to assist in accomplishing these goals.

Objectives

Working under the direction of the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer and in concert with the Office of the President, the selected agency will:

1. develop and execute a five-year plan to raise the overall brand awareness and national visibility of Southwestern University;
2. strengthen the competitive position and increase overall familiarity with Southwestern University’s distinctive value proposition among key influencers; and,
3. provide ongoing reputation-management partnership and counsel to Southwestern.

Scope of Work

The selected agency would be expected to:

- identify current gaps in the University’s brand awareness;
- propose unique opportunities to raise the visibility of Southwestern as a brand and as an institution among national media, higher-education trade media, and other key influencers;
- present the agency’s ideas to leverage the expertise of our president, faculty, and key staff through targeted media relations, opinion editorial placements, and speaking opportunities;



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- connect the agency's plan to Southwestern's current marketing assets, including digital strategies for use on the University's website and social-media platforms;
- detail the agency's approach to establishing metrics for their plan and describe how they will monitor marketing effectiveness, including recommendations for redirection of resources, as needed; and
- ensure the five-year plan aligns with the University's mission, vision, and values.

Submission Specifications

1. All proposals must be submitted electronically to Southwestern University's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer no later than 5:00 p.m. (CDT) on Monday, August 9, 2021.
2. Proposals must include a plan, timeline, budget, account team bios, and team assignments.
3. Three examples of previous and similar work that has been completed by the agency within the last four years must be included in the proposal.
4. A list of all other university and higher-education business and any affiliation or prior relationship with Southwestern University must be disclosed in the proposal.
5. Any questions about the RFP or Southwestern University should be emailed to Dinah Ritchie, Strategic Marketing Manager, at ritchied@southwestern.edu.

Due Date

August 9, 2021 before 5:00 p.m. (CDT)

Email Address for Submittals

Scarlett J. Moss, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
Email: mossj@southwestern.edu

Selection Process

All RFP submissions will be reviewed by Southwestern University's Office of Marketing and Communications. A limited number of finalists will be asked to present (either in person or via Zoom) to a selection panel that will include President Laura E. Skandera Trombley and CMCO Scarlett J. Moss. The selection panel will rank the top two agencies and then conduct background checks on the agencies. Once the finalist is selected, contract negotiations will begin and conclude within 45 days.