



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

GLOBAL BRAND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMMING

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
March 12, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this RFP is to identify experts who can lead from demonstrated experience the successful creation and implementation of this project. U.S. Soy faces worldwide competition from other soybean-producing countries as well as other vegetable protein and oil products and is in the crosshairs of conversation about sustainability, production practices, food and health issues which are not always factual or in context.

U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) has an ongoing reputation management strategy and program that works to positively influence and drive the reputation of U.S. Soy products and the producers of U.S. Soy.

USSEC also needs ongoing support to maintain existing digital properties (websites) and digital communications capacity (social media and Hubspot-based marketing and communications).

USSEC seeks proposals to:

1. Support a reputation management strategy and program that protects, enhances and expands U.S. Soy's global reputation, ensures positive visibility and broad exposure of U.S. Soy.
2. Convey timely and critical messages that differentiate and creates a preference for U.S. Soy over soy from competitive origins and competitive alternative products, while maintaining market access.
3. Provide USSEC ongoing marketing and communications support in terms of maintaining and enhancing our digital presence and capacity.

4. Provide USSEC with analytics and measurements to assess the impact of its strategy and program.

PURPOSE OF RFP

USSEC seeks marketing and public relations agencies with demonstrated capacity to:

- Create and execute integrated strategic efforts that build the reputation of U.S. Soy internationally;
- Utilize existing data to establish and measure against metrics of overall brand reputation;
- Refresh messaging;
- Defend the U.S. Soy brand reputation globally, respond to misinformation and issue management.

USSEC's standard practice is to RFP for contractual work every 3 years in an open and competitive manner. This type of cost analysis will assist in determining the fair market value for the work to be performed and allows USSEC the opportunity to evaluate various proposals and select the best contractor for the job based on experience, availability, expertise, approach, and cost.

Contractors will be selected for the term of April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022, to complete work in the current fiscal year, and be qualified for engagement through September 30, 2024.

INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must contain at a minimum the specific criteria listed below:

1. Please email the proposal to RFP@USSEC.ORG by NOON Central March 12, 2021.
2. A description of the Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources, and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
3. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
4. Provide a minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly-sized clients for reference purposes.
5. Detailed Budget
 - All bids for services must provide a breakout of how the fee was derived including but not limited to a breakdown of hourly rate and the amount of hours they anticipate to execute the work.
 - Please segment the costs associated with functions BRAND MARKETNG and BRAND REPUTATION work, as defined under SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK.

SCOPE OF WORK:

Contractors are expected to conduct the following work, which are segmented into key functions:

USSEC Brand Marketing

USSEC currently markets under the brand US SOY. Within the US SOY brand, USSEC promotes the advantages that the U.S. Soy industry brings to global target audiences.

The U.S. SOY Advantage theme is an umbrella under which USSEC presents messaging around several pillars, including soy protein, soybean oil and the sustainability.

Global Integrated Digital and Social Media Marketing Campaigns

USSEC will organize ongoing global integrated digital and social media marketing campaigns promoting the messages around these pillars. This work includes:

1. Annually review the USSEC brand and update brand guidelines. Update US SOY templates.
2. Evaluate the U.S. Soy Advantage theme and create a new theme or refresh the current theme.
3. Work with USSEC subject matter experts annually to update marketing messages and materials around identified pillars and create highly compelling marketing materials. Marketing materials include:
 - a. PowerPoint presentations
 - b. Subject background documents
 - c. Digital graphics
 - d. Infographics
 - e. Short turn video bundles
4. Implement multilingual global digital and social media campaigns around the USSEC marketing pillars. Implementation includes:
 - a. Campaign landing pages or microsites
 - b. Development of digital and social media advertisements
 - c. Creation and updating of marketing pillar materials as necessary
 - d. Placement of paid and unpaid advertising in digital and social media channels

Note on Proposal Development: When preparing a proposal, please present the costs to develop and rollout one (1) pillar. Items #3 & 4 above.

Event Branding

USSEC participates in several trade shows each year. These events include Commodity Classic, National Association of Farm Broadcasters Convention and the USSEC Global Trade Exchange. USSEC requires the contractor to:

1. Propose and implement creative strategies for promoting USSEC and the U.S. SOY brand at these events.
2. Organize media relations efforts at the events.
3. Provide on-site support to USSEC Communications team at these events

USSEC Brand Reputation

USSOY.ORG

Provide strategic input and support for USSEC's current brand reputation efforts that focus on US SOY. USSOY.org is a focal point for USSEC brand reputation. USSOY.org is an externally facing brand vehicle. This work includes:

- a. Using USSOY.org, the current USSEC centric brand reputation vehicle, that operates independently, but in close collaboration with USB's brand reputation platforms and programs.
 - i. Establish a US SOY editorial calendar that presents engaging content to international audiences enhancing the reputation of US Soy while communicating core marketing messages and driving to achieve the brand reputation goals.
 - ii. Produce and publish multilingual content (up to seven languages) that achieves the goals noted above.
 - iii. Develop and implement a digital and social media advertising campaigns that support the overall USSOY.org brand reputation efforts.
 - iv. Manage analysis of subscriber engagement to drive future strategy, content development and placement.
 - v. Maintain the USSOY.org website.
- b. Using existing research and data to establish baseline metrics and insights about the current international reputation of U.S. Soy and establish on-going metrics for monitoring changes in reputation on an on-going basis.
- c. Where and when necessary defend U.S. Soy by monitoring and responding to misinformation regarding U.S. Soy internationally and domestically, including identifying and acting upon opportunities to protect and enhance the global reputation of U.S. Soy including:
 - Using established baseline information about the reputation of U.S. soybeans and its industry.
 - Measure and categorize issues, online and offline, which impact the reputation of U.S. Soy and catalog key influencers.
 - Develop a global strategy to act upon misinformation and other issues as well as to build the reputation of U.S. Soy.
 - Provide support of the strategy on an ongoing basis.

Digital Communications

USSOY.org provides up-to-date information to subscribers. USSEC manages its ability to communicate in real time, and track engagement with USSEC content, through Hubspot. USSEC requires the contractor to:

- a. Manage USSEC's Hubspot subscriber lists.
- b. Propose and implement efforts that will optimize USSEC's ability to narrowly identify subscribers' interests to engage them and deliver highly targeted marketing messages.
- c. Propose and implement paid and free advertising campaign to expand engagement with USSOY.org.
- d. Provide ongoing training to USSEC business units on how to best use Hubspot to for outreach and marketing and to drive partner and customer loyalty.

Thought Leadership and Executive Visibility

USSEC has an active executive visibility program, which focuses on the USSEC CEO. USSEC has also began a thought leadership program under the concept of the Soy-Suite. USSEC requires the contractor to:

- a. Propose and organize an integrated Executive Visibility and Thought Leadership program that closely aligns with the established editorial calendar above.
- b. Interact with USSEC's CEO to propose and draft executive visibility messages.
- c. Develop a strategy for regular content development and placement of that content to establish USSEC as an industry-wide leader in issues around the global soy complex.

Digital Capabilities

Maintain and update USSEC's websites.

USSEC Media Relations

USSEC collaborates with USB on mainstream media relations; however, USSEC is responsible for media relations involving its investor audience, that being the U.S. agriculture media. As such, USSEC requires the contractor to:

- Pitch ag media current and timely stories as it relates to USSEC and U.S. soy exports, international markets and supply and demand hot topics.
- Write talking points based on the issues at hand, aligning USSEC's marketing messages from the identified pillars.
- Host media interviews with USSEC leadership, including senior management and grower leaders.

- Provide weekly reports of USSEC in the news, sharing reach and tone.
- Assist and support media relations as needed for: Commodity Classic and Global Trade Exchange.

ADDITIONAL ASPECTS TO THE SCOPE OF THE RFP

Proposals for this work can:

- Address it in its entirety by a single organization or as a joint proposal among more than one organization.
- Address specific scopes of work that an organization is most competent to address.

This work will require:

- Collaboration with the checkoff's primary contractors and subcontractors around CRM maximization, content marketing, ad placement, publications, presentations, existing insights, crisis communications and farmer communications.
- Operation within the current USB brand structure determined by brand strategy work expected to be completed in August 2021.
- Messaging consistent with USSEC and USB message book.
- Performance within the checkoff's KPI framework.

The following traits are desirable:

- Current soybean or other agribusiness industry engagement
- Relationships with national and international media
- Consumer package goods (food) and consumer experience
- Global footprint or access to market insights
- Metrics capabilities (both establishing and on-going measurement against)

Each component of the work outlined above should include basic reporting metrics.

Samples of creative work as recommended to support the campaign are welcome to demonstrate competence, including news coverage created and successes in international campaigns.

Timeline

NOTE: The following timeline is a guide.

Our expectation is for the work to last from October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022.

RFP TIMELINE:

RFP Distribution:

February 19, 2021

RFP Briefing:	March 5, 2021
Project Proposals Due:	March 12, 2018 by Noon Central Time
Selections Made By:	March 30, 2018
Prospective Contractors Notified By:	April 1, 2018

Every attempt will be made to adhere to this timeline. However, we reserve the right to change if unforeseen circumstance dictates.

Engagement Information

Firm will be required to become familiar with USSEC policy and adhere to the requirements of the *Soybean Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act & Order* and other related government mandates for checkoff programs which govern USSEC.

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Proposals are due by noon on March 5, 2021 via email to: rfp@ussec.org.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

In order to create a transparent proposal process, all questions received on this topic will be shared with all interested parties.

To assist interested organizations respond to this proposal USSEC will organize a public web based briefing on the proposal. During this meeting USSEC will provide background on the proposal and answer questions. This briefing will take place on March 1, 2021.

To receive an invitation to the RFP briefing please contact USSEC Project Manager, at barrington@ussec.org Direct additional questions to Brandi Masimba, USSEC Project Manager, at barrington@ussec.org

REQUIRED INFORMATION FOR PROPOSALS:

Proposals must contain at a minimum the specific criteria listed below:

- A description of the Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
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INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

ABOUT U.S. SOYBEAN EXPORT COUNCIL (USSEC)

USSEC is a dynamic partnership of key stakeholders representing soybean producers, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusiness and agricultural organizations.

Through a global network of international offices and strong support in the U.S., we help build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocate for the use of soy in feed, aquaculture and human consumption, promote the benefits of soy use through education and connect industry leaders through a robust membership program.

Our 15-member board of directors is comprised of four members from the American Soybean Association (ASA), four members from the United Soybean Board (USB), and seven members representing trade, allied industry, and state organizations. New board members are seated annually. We are receiving funding from a variety of sources including soy producer checkoff dollars invested by the USB and various state soybean councils; cooperating industry; and the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agriculture Service.

The United Soybean Board, created by the 1990 Farm Bill to manage and direct the National Soybean Checkoff, is dedicated to marketing and research for the soybean industry. USB is comprised of 73 volunteer soybean farmers representing the interests of fellow growers nationwide. Each board member is nominated by Qualified State Soybean Boards (QSSBs) and appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Because of the limitations on administrative and salary costs established in the Act, USB outsources the majority of its program management responsibilities to USB's

three primary contractors:

- SmithBucklin-St. Louis for domestic marketing, new uses, production research and Board initiative activities;
- Osborn & Barr Communications for communications/public relations activities and;
- U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) for international marketing and global opportunities activities.

As one of these three primary contractors USSEC may also undertake initiative activities on behalf of USB. USB considers primary contractor staff (approximately 60 people) as core USB staff. These three primary contractors use a number of subcontractors and, together, these entities carry out approximately 450 projects each year for USB. USB also manages approximately 10 subcontractors.

NOTES:

- Prospective Contractors are hereby notified that proposals will be duplicated for internal review only. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of all information presented. The appropriate representatives from staff and legal counsel will review proposals. Proposals will not be returned.
- USSEC reserves the right to retain all proposals submitted. Submission of a proposal indicates acceptance by the submitter of the conditions contained in the request for proposal, unless clearly and specifically noted in the proposal submitted and confirmed in the contract between USSEC and the contractor selected.
- Confidentiality - Without USSEC's prior written consent, Prospective Contractors and its officers, employees, agents, representatives, affiliates, and subcontractors shall not disclose to any third party any documents, materials or information that the Prospective Contractors learns from or is provided in relation to the RFP request.
- During the evaluation process, USSEC reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from proposers, or to allow corrections of errors and omissions.
- USSEC reserves the right to reject any proposal that is in any way inconsistent or irregular. USSEC also reserves the right to waive proposal defects or deficiencies, to request additional information, and/or to negotiate with the Prospective Contractor regarding the proposal.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that Fees are in lieu of any and all other benefits, including, but not limited to, repayment of any and all taxes related to contractor service fees, health and life insurance, administrative costs and vacation.

- Prospective Contractor agrees that any income taxes, value added taxes or any other form of direct or indirect taxes on compensation paid under the contract shall be paid by Contractor and not by USSEC or Funding Sources.
- Prior to any payment to a Contractor, a contractor must provide a W-9, W-8, or W-8BEN upon agreement signature
- Non-Competition. Contractor shall not act as agent or representative for any product or service directly or indirectly competitive with U.S. soybeans or soybean products for the length of the contract.
- USSEC and Prospective Contractor agrees to comply with the provisions of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). USSEC provides EEO to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws.