

Housing Action Illinois
RFP for Communications Consultant
April 2, 2014

Summary

Housing Action Illinois seeks an experienced consultant to work with them to develop a communications plan for internal and external audiences, and to provide Board and staff training to effectively implement the plan. We would prefer to begin work immediately after a consultant is selected and be completed within 6 months of the start date. The proposal deadline is April 30, 2014.

Organizational Overviews

Housing Action Illinois is a statewide coalition formed to preserve and expand the availability of quality, affordable housing throughout Illinois. Our mission is to strengthen communities through the pursuit of a safe and affordable home for all. We advance this mission by creating a network of resources, including community stakeholders, residents, businesses, government and housing experts, to increase the supply and availability of affordable housing throughout Illinois, while strengthening the capacity of community-level organizations to serve those in need.

Housing Action works through three (3) program areas: Public Policy Advocacy; Public Education and Organizing; and Training and Technical Assistance (primarily for nonprofit Developers and Counselors). We are a membership-based coalition, with over 170 organizational members, including nonprofit affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies, and homeless and supportive service providers, among others. Housing Action's Board of Directors consists primarily of Executive Directors and senior program staff of our member organizations. Currently, Housing Action is funded through a mix of government, corporate and foundation grants, with some additional revenue coming from other sources such as membership dues.

During the past 25 years, Housing Action has enjoyed notable success, including leading significant public policy campaigns to establish resources for affordable housing and providing necessary capacity building support to other affordable housing non-profit organizations. During the past 5 years, the organization experienced a growing demand for its services, particularly relating to foreclosure-mitigation initiatives. However, as Housing Action has been confronted with ever-increasing demands on its expertise and staff, funding has fluctuated or stopped altogether. Despite uncertainty caused by these external factors, Housing Action seeks to strategically position itself to continue its leadership role for affordable housing throughout Illinois, which includes developing entrepreneurial funding strategies in order to sustain the organization over the long-term. Our goal is to thrive, and not merely survive, during these uncertain times, and to continue to be a meaningful resource for our membership, which is trying to do the same.

Housing Action recently completed a strategic planning process that identified three strategic priorities to guide our work for 2013-2015:

Priority #1: Expand affordable housing opportunities and stabilize communities throughout the state.

Priority #2: Foster collaborations and partnerships among our members and other statewide housing organizations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Housing Action Illinois, its members and its partners.

Priority #3: Create a financially sustainable organization that has diverse revenue streams.

The consultant selected through this RFP process is to assist Housing Action realize its priorities through the use of effective communications strategies as detailed in a comprehensive communications plan.

Project Description – Desired Outcomes

Housing Action seeks an experienced consultant to work with identified members of their Board and staff to develop a communications plan for internal (Board and members) and external audiences (e.g., elected officials, potential partners and members, etc.), and to provide Board and staff training to effectively implement the plan.

As part of a recent strategic planning initiative, Housing Action updated its messaging, brand strategy and visual identity with the support of the Taproot Foundation. A copy of this messaging is available upon request by emailing Nieta at nieta@housingactionil.org. We have rolled out our new visual identity and website, although we seek training in terms of how to consistently use the messaging we have developed and need assistance in determining how to further develop the use of our website, social media and an information alert system we manage, particularly given our limited resources.

While Housing Action has many foundational pieces in place, they are not always well coordinated and are not branded consistently. We are concerned that this has contributed to a lack of recognition for all that Housing Action (and our members as we try to highlight their successes) has accomplished and is actively doing to advance the affordable housing cause.

Specific issues we would like to have addressed as part of our communications plan include:

- Assistance in establishing defined (and realistic) goals for our different communications activities and the audiences we want to reach;
- A review of the messages we want to be delivered in a consistent and compelling manner;
- An assessment of what materials and tools we need to be able to implement our communications plan;
- Metrics for evaluating the future success of our communications efforts.

Currently, all staff play some role in communicating with our various audiences, with no one staff person responsible for coordinating or ensuring that this happens on a consistent basis. An integral part of the communications plan will be identifying the infrastructure (staffing and systems) necessary to realize the plan given this current lack of dedicated staff. We would also like to have Board and staff training on how to implement the communications plan included as part of this engagement.

A key measure of success of this engagement will be that it results in a clear plan that Housing Action can implement.

During this same time frame, we will also be working with a consultant to assist us with developing a fundraising plan, which will be supported by our overall communications activities. Please consider submitting a combined proposal to address both the RFP for Fundraising Planning Consultant this RFP for Communications Consultant if you believe you have the skill sets necessary to accomplish both.

Proposal Requirements

A. Project Approach & Work Plan: In this section, please describe how you would approach a project such as this, including suggested plan components, research required, etc. Housing Action anticipates working closely with the selected consultant in order to provide background information and to develop the final work plan and timeline, so we are most interested here in learning what you believe are important and necessary steps for an effective communications plan.

B. Qualifications: Provide a description of your specific skills related to this project, including a discussion of any similar projects undertaken. In addition, include:

- Name and direct contact information
- Education
- Work experience
- Significant accomplishments

If there will be other members of your staff or affiliated persons providing services on this project, please include the information specified above for each team member. Preference will be given to those who have substantial prior experience developing communications plans for non-profit organizations that engage in similar activities, such as policy advocacy and/or membership outreach.

C. References: List names, address, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses of three to five business references for whom communication plans have been completed and briefly describe the type of services provided. The consultant must grant permission to Housing Action Illinois to contact the references and others who may have pertinent information regarding the consultant's qualifications and experience to perform the services required by the project.

D. Budget: The proposal must provide a comprehensive, itemized project budget with narrative and time period over which funds will be expended. Our budget for these consultant services is no more than \$10,000.

Due Date: April 30, 2014

Please submit proposals by email only to rfp-response@housingactionil.org, with "Communications Proposal" in the subject line. Please note that no one will be able to respond to your submission (except for a request for a copy of our messaging document) prior to April 23, 2014.