



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

(RFA)

Title: COVID-19 Communications Activities

Funding: Mixed Source Federal

Baltimore City Health Department
Office of Communications

Release Date: Friday February 24, 2023

Letter of Intent: March 11, 2023

Application Due: March 24 by 5:00pm EST

Anticipated Award Notification: April 7, 2023

Anticipated Contract Start: April 17, 2023

I. Introduction

Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is the recipient of both American Rescue Plan Act funding and Federal Emergency Management Agency funding to support its response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The objective of BCHD's COVID-19 communications strategy is primarily to increase the vaccination rates of Baltimore populations least likely to be vaccinated, such as adolescent children, younger adults aged 18-35, and African Americans; and to ensure that vaccinated residents (especially the older and auto-immune compromised) receive their booster shot.

To achieve this, BCHD wants to determine why specific sub-populations' vaccination rates are significantly lower, and in turn determine what could compel them to receive their first shot or booster.

Then, BCHD will determine a strategy to reach each population using earned media, social media, broadcast and digital ads, and other means.

BCHD has \$1 million in federal funding for about the next two years to develop and implement this plan, with the ultimate goal of saving as many lives and reducing the severity of effects as possible from COVID-19 related illness.

Our vaccination campaign has three primary goals:

1. To align with the City outcome to reach at least 80% of all City residents with the COVID-19 vaccine, BCHD will focus on vaccinating older adults, homebound residents, and other special populations to ensure they receive vaccinations in an accessible and equitable manner.
2. To reduce COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among City residents, with emphasis on populations that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, by providing accurate and transparent health information and improving community trust of BCHD.
3. To ensure that all health providers and BCHD staff have the training and tools to reach community members about COVID-19 effectively and efficiently.

II. Background

Over the last two years, BCHD and its community partners have made significant progress in reducing the incidence of new COVID-19 cases through targeted outreach and the provision of accessible vaccination services.

To address the gaps in vaccination, since 2020 BCHD has pursued a multifaceted strategy to vaccinate Baltimore City residents against COVID-19. Unfortunately, disparities in vaccination access still exist, and we seek to reduce, if not eliminate, these disparities via this federal funding.

The effort that this RFA will support will include an all-encompassing communications strategy in which earned media, social media, targeted messaging, and broadcast and digital ads will be used to reach unvaccinated and under-vaccinated Baltimore residents. This is likely to include target groups such as parents of adolescent children (the latter of whom have low vaccination rates), younger adults aged 18-35 (who themselves have low vaccination rates), African Americans (who are vaccine-hesitant), and older populations (who are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and therefore most in need of booster shots).

BCHD has a communications budget of \$1 million to develop and implement strategies and activities to reach one or each of these targeted groups to increase their vaccination rate and/or booster rate.

III. Project Scope

BCHD will award as many grants as is necessary, totaling \$1,000,000, for support to BCHD's COVID-19 communications strategy. The work under this project is divided into 12 category areas, and applicants may apply to work on as many categories as they wish. They are:

1. Website

- Identify and purchase domain name, rebuild site infrastructure and capabilities, advise and execute layout for visual impact and navigability, maintain site's search engine optimization, and make regular updates

2. Graphic Design

- Advise and produce graphics to promote the BCHD COVID campaign to target demographics

3. Translation

- Provide translations of any resource, including website and advertisements, to engage non-English-speaking residents

4. Television Advertising

- Pre-production: script writing and message guidance, cast and crew identification and hiring, location identification and acquisition, equipment identification and acquisition, set design, and prop acquisition
- Filming: direction, execution, and set breakdown
- Post-production: video, audio, and graphics editing
- Ad buy: consult with BCHD on pricing and placement efficacy, negotiate with stations, monitor advertisements to ensure stations comply with contract, and report to BCHD on performance of advertisements and make recommendations

5. Radio Advertising

- Pre-production: script writing and message guidance, voice talent and crew identification and hiring, and equipment identification and acquisition
- Recording: direction and execution
- Post-production: editing
- Ad buy: consult with BCHD on pricing and placement efficacy, negotiate with stations, monitor advertisements to ensure stations comply with contract, and report to BCHD on performance of advertisements and make recommendations

6. Digital/Internet Advertising

- Pre-production: script writing and message guidance, cast and crew identification and hiring, location identification and acquisition, equipment identification and acquisition, and set design
- Filming: direction, execution, and set breakdown
- Post-production: video, audio, and graphics editing
- Ad buy: consult with BCHD on pricing and placement efficacy, negotiate with websites, monitor advertisement to ensure websites comply with contract, and report to BCHD on performance of advertisements and make recommendations

7. Social Media

- Audit BCHD social media channels and advise on strategy to add followers and reach target audience
- Monitor progress and provide recommendations
- Use geofencing to reach hyper-local target audience
- Identify and recruit social media influencers to partner with to reach target audience; monitor partnership to ensure influencers comply with contract; and report to BCHD on performance of partnership and make recommendations

- Ad buy: consult with BCHD on pricing and placement efficacy, negotiate with platforms, monitor advertisements to ensure platforms comply with contract, and report to BCHD on performance of advertisement and make recommendations

8. SMS Texting

- Help acquire cell phone numbers of target Baltimore residents, help develop text language using target-specific messaging, advise on ideal times and days to text target populations, and text target populations

9. Focus Groups

- Advise on demographics of participants
- Identify, recruit, and execute payment to participants;
- Identify and provide ideal Baltimore location for focus groups;
- Advise on significant questions to ask participants;
- Facilitate and record focus groups
- Report focus group findings
- Provide recommendations based on focus group findings.

The focus groups are likely to pertain to parents of adolescent children and younger adults, aged 18 to 35.

10. Polling

- Advise on demographics of participants
- Identify and conduct outreach to polls participants
- Advise on significant questions to ask
- Report findings of polls
- Provide recommendations based on poll findings

The polls are likely to pertain to parents of adolescent children and younger adults, aged 18 to 35.

11. Video and Audio Testimonials

- Help identify Baltimore residents with compelling COVID stories
- Plan and execute the filming and recording of these testimonials
- Edit the film and recordings of these testimonials for the production of video and audio shorts to be used on various platforms

12. Canvassing

- Identify neighborhoods and homes of unvaccinated target audience
- Advise on canvasser script and messaging; provide script to canvassers

- Hire and facilitate payment to canvassers
- Identify and provide launching station; organize canvassers, including what days and times are ideal for canvassing

This **project will be 18 months in duration**, contingent upon available funding. The initial implementation period will start May 1, 2023 and end December 31, 2024. Quarterly progress reports are required and are subject to approval for funding renewal.

BCHD will instruct successful applicants on the target populations, geographic areas, schedule of activities, and evaluation methods and metrics they will undertake.

IV. How to Apply

Applicants will begin by submitting a Letter of Intent by March 11, 2023. Full applications will be due to BCHD on March 24, 2023 by 5:00 PM. Applicants will be notified about the status of their application by April 7, 2023.

Step 1: Letter of Intent We recommend that applicants submit a Letter of Intent. Knowing how many applications we should expect will help us plan our processing and review of the applications. We strongly recommend that prospective applicants use the LOI template in Attachment 2. Applicants must send the Letters of Intent via email to Arinze Ifekauche at Arinze.Ifekauche@baltimorecity.gov by March 11 by 5:00 PM. In the subject line of the email, please state your organization's name and the RFA category areas for your application. *A hard copy is not necessary.*

Step 2: Submission of Applications: Organizations should read and understand both this RFA and the terms and conditions in the attached document for the American Rescue Plan Act before beginning to write their applications.

Applications are due by email by 5:00 PM ET on March 24, 2023.

Electronic versions of applications for COVID-19 Communications should be emailed to Arinze Ifekauche at Arinze.Ifekauche@baltimorecity.gov. In the subject line of the email, please state your organization's name and the RFA category areas of your application.

Applications must include the following items for consideration:

(1) Transmittal email: This email from the applicant organization must specify the title of the application, the applicant organization, the project director, and the funding requested.

(2) Authorized signature: The cover sheet of the budget form (Attachment 4) should be completed and signed by the chief executive officer or the person responsible for

conducting the affairs of the applicant organization and legally authorized to execute contracts on behalf of the applicant organization.

(3) Application:

Application narratives are limited to 10 pages for a single category area; if applying for more than one category, add 3 pages per additional category to the maximum. You may use the pages as you see fit, e.g., if you apply for two categories, you would have a total of 13 pages and could, if you want, devote 7 pages to one category and 6 to the other. Use headings to separate each category area.

The narrative is to be single-spaced on standard 8 ½" x 11" paper with one-inch margins and using 12-point Times New Roman or Arial/Helvetica typeface. Tables and charts may use a 10-point typeface. The application pages must be numbered. The budget and budget justification are not included in the page limit. The appendices specified in the guidelines below are also excluded from the 10-page limit.

The application should be structured using these topic headings:

Table of contents (not included in the 10-page limit)

- I. Summary of Organization/Company History
- II. Organization Capacity (specific to this RFA's work needs)
- III. Organization Experience (relevant to this RFA's work needs)
- IV. Examples of work products (2 or 3 per category)
- V. Proposed approach and methods
- VI. Project budget and justification (Attachment 5)
- VII. Appendices (not included in the 10-page limit)
 - A. Mandatory appendices:
 1. Letters of support from prospective subcontractors/partners
 2. Résumés of key personnel (2 page maximum each)
 3. Organizational chart
 4. List of officers and Board of Directors or other governing body, if any
 5. Form 990, if the organization is required to file it
 6. Most recent financial audit
 7. Documentation of being in good standing as a business/organization with the State of Maryland

Appendices should include only the material necessary to support the application. Applications should set off each component with headings using the Roman numerals and bold-face titles below.

Components of the application are:

- I. **Organization Experience** (30 points): Identify your organization's high-profile project successes and previous work with the targeted communities, and list other work done in the category areas for which you are applying.

II. **Examples of work products** (20 points): For category areas where tangible deliverables exist, provide internet links to past projects that demonstrate the quality of your work. Send two or three links per category area for which you are applying.

III. **Proposed approach and methods** (50 points): Identify and explain:

- How you will go about providing the services and tangible products
- What activities you will undertake
- A schedule for milestones and deliverables
- Outcomes you expect

IV. **Project Budget** The applicant must provide a budget for the full project period. Applicants must use the Budget Form provided in Attachment 5 of the RFA. Applicants must include a line-item budget narrative detailing the purpose of each budget expenditure. This form will be the actual budget that will be used for the vendor contract and requires significant attention. If an organization is seeking an indirect cost rate, it can be no greater than 10%, unless the organization already has a federal negotiated NICRA. Organizations applying for multiple categories must complete separate budgets for each category.

Application budgets are not scored *per se*, as post-award negotiations and adjustments to meet BCHD's funding constraints are anticipated.

BCHD Budget Instructions are included as Attachment 3:

V. Additional Application Information

Eligibility to apply: this RFA is open to any nonprofit, private-for-profit, or governmental entity in good standing with the State of Maryland and with the experience and capacity to perform the work described in this RFA.

Form of the agreement: The agreements with approved applicants will be styled as contracts, and will be subject to City of Baltimore laws, policies, regulations, and business practices. Performance is also subject to ARPA guidelines and requirements.

The Baltimore City Health Department reserves the rights to:

- Approve and fund parts of applications and not approve or fund other parts
- Negotiate funding levels
- Negotiate the modification or removal of project activities or methods
- Select multiple applications to work on a single category area
- Decline to approve any and all applicants

Disclaimer on applying under multiple category areas: BCHD has styled this application so that organizations can place all their category area proposals in one document as a convenience to applicants, in lieu of requiring the submission of multiple full applications. BCHD and the applicant reviewers thus will treat each category area request as a separate application. An applicant thus may be approved for funding on one or some of the category areas, but not all. Each category area proposal, therefore, must stand on its own.

For multiple category area applications:

- Set off each category area proposal with a conspicuous heading. We recommend doing so in bold type, with a 16-point typeface.
- Do not use blank separation pages.
- We expect components I through V to be identical for every category area, so do not repeat those for each category area. Instead, provide responses to components VI through IX.

Applicants are expected to review language and share concerns on language, specifically the ARPA terms and conditions, with BCHD **before** submitting an application.

Application review and selection procedure: BCHD will select a review team including both BCHD employees and outside persons with knowledge related to COVID vaccination efforts and contract-based partnerships. They will independently score each application on a scale of 0-100. Point allocations for each component are provided in parentheses in the Components section on page 8. The review team will use the arithmetic mean of the reviewers' scores as the applications' scores. Applications proposing projects in multiple category areas will receive separate scores for each proposed project.

The review team will then rank all proposals by score in each category area and recommend for approval and funding the highest scoring proposals to BCHD's Office of Communications. That Office will make final determinations based on negotiations with recommended applicants involving budget limitations and priorities. If an agreement cannot be reached with an approved applicant, the Office will not select that applicant and will open negotiations with the next-highest ranking applicant. Approval and funding decisions are not subject to appeal.

Questions from Applicants

Please email questions to Arinze.lfekauche@baltimorecity.gov by March 3. All questions received by BCHD will be included on a master question and answer document and posted on BCHD's website.

Health Department Office

The program office is located at 1001 E. Fayette Street.