



Request for Proposals (RFP)

Marketing, Communications, and Public Relations Services

Purpose

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to identify an experienced, full-service marketing and communications consultant or agency to support Think Big's strategic marketing, branding, public relations, and community engagement initiatives.

Think Big is expanding its programs, events, and entrepreneurial education initiatives across Rockford and the greater Northern Illinois region. The selected consultant/agency will strengthen Think Big's brand presence, visibility, and storytelling building awareness around its mission to empower minority- and women-owned businesses, elevate local entrepreneurs, and foster inclusive economic development.

The ideal partner will serve as a creative and strategic extension of the Think Big team, offering comprehensive marketing support that enhances internal capacity and maximizes community impact.

Overview

The Think Big Marketing and Communications Project support strategic outreach and engagement efforts to increase visibility, participation, and impact across all of Think Big's initiatives including business education, market activation, and community development programs.

The selected Marketing Firm or Individual will be responsible for developing and executing a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy that strengthens Think Big's brand identity, promotes its programs and events, and enhances engagement with entrepreneurs, partners, and the broader community.

The firm or individual will oversee campaign planning, creative development, and implementation; manage communication with media partners, vendors, and internal teams; and ensure that Think Big's messaging aligns with its mission of equitable economic empowerment and community advancement.

Scope of Work

Marketing Communications Services

This will include, but is not limited to, the following responsibilities:

- Develop robust and innovative marketing, communications, and community engagement goals, strategies with clear goals and KPIs, and tactics to reach these goals.
- Tell Think Big's story with a well-defined visual identity, messaging, and high-quality, impactful content.
- Increase public awareness across the city with targeted marketing campaigns about the origin, purpose, goals, mission, values, impact, and outcomes of Think Big's work.
- Develop well-written and designed print and digital outreach materials for:
 - Organizations, including clean energy businesses, financial institutions, community-based organizations, and government partners.
 - Design and execute email marketing campaigns.
 - Create photographic images, videos, and other visual content to inform target audiences about the organization's mission, vision, values, products, and services.
 - Facilitate communication about regulatory or policy initiatives to stakeholders, including legislators and government entities.

- Produce a Think Big annual report.
- Develop marketing campaigns for specific programs, workshops, and events when needed.

Develop and implement innovative and engaging social media strategies and content, including:

- Use strong graphics and digital storytelling to grow the organization's digital presence.
- Expand audiences and increase engagement on both established and new social media platforms.
- Test social media messaging to identify core audiences and compelling narratives.
- Report results regularly as requested.
- Social Media Management: 3–4 posts per week across LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook
- Custom Graphics for all posts and campaigns.
- Monthly Social Media Performance Reports.
- Event Marketing for Think Big Graduations and up to ten (10) additional events.
- Press Release Writing, Editing, and Local Media Pitching (Unlimited).
- Bi-Weekly Newsletters (including copywriting, layout, and platform support).
- Public Relations Development (talking points and media interview prep).
- Priority Turnaround (rush graphics or messaging within 48 hours).
- Monthly Strategy and Branding Development Sessions.
- Branding Kit Revisions or Development.
- Ad Purchasing and Management (as needed).
- External Marketing Coordination Support.
- Website and E-blast Management and Coordination.

Performance Requirements

The selected consultant/agency will provide full-service marketing and communications and play a vital role in shaping Think Big's brand identity, amplifying program outcomes, and ensuring consistent communication across all public-facing platforms.

- Increase awareness and visibility of Think Big's programs, services, and events.
- Strengthen Think Big's position as a regional leader in inclusive entrepreneurship.
- Engage target audiences including entrepreneurs, community partners, funders, policymakers, and key stakeholders.
- Maintain consistent, professional, and creative messaging across all platforms.

Qualifications

Think Big will award a contract to the consultant or agency that demonstrates:

- Proven experience in full-service marketing and communications for mission-driven organizations.
- Strong understanding of entrepreneurship, community development, and nonprofit sectors.
- Demonstrated ability to reach and resonate with diverse, multicultural audiences.
- Portfolio showcasing creative design, storytelling, and measurable campaign outcomes.
- Capacity for quick turnaround times and adaptive project management.
- Commitment to equity, inclusion, and representation in marketing content and staffing.

Contract Term

- Type: Independent Contractor or Firm Agreement
- Term: Six (6) months, renewable based on performance and funding availability.
- Compensation: Negotiable based on experience and scope of services.
- Reports To: Think Big Chief Executive Officer
- Location: Rockford, Illinois (Hybrid on-site and remote as needed).

Bid Submission Requirements

Please submit a proposal that includes:

- Qualifications and Experience.
- Understanding Think Big's mission and proposed approach to the work.
- Description of your organization, structure, and key personnel.
- Examples of similar projects or partnerships with measurable impact.
- Work samples (social media posts, campaigns, press releases, branding examples).
- Three client references with contact information.
- Statement describing your commitment to diversity and community inclusion.
- Statement of availability and potential start date.
- Compliance Requirements

The selected agency must:

- Comply with Think Big's procurement and ethical standards.
- Execute a nondisclosure agreement prior to project start.
- Remain compliant with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

Submission Instructions and Timeline

Please submit proposals electronically to sheila@thinkbig815.org with the subject line:

Think Big Marketing and Communications RFP Submission. Provide the information and attachments requested as outlined above in the Bid Submission Requirements Section. Submit all required documents by the deadline: November 30, 2025 (by 5:00 PM CDT)

RFP Schedule

RFP Release: November 1, 2025

Questions: All questions must be submitted in writing to the contact person listed above by November 14, 2025. Responses to all questions will be posted publicly by November 25, 2025.

Anticipated Start Date: January 2, 2025

Think Big is a minority and women led entrepreneurial incubator and business accelerator located at 1311 North Main Street, Rockford, Illinois. We serve as a catalyst for economic empowerment, innovation, and collaboration by equipping small business owners with education, coaching, and capital access.

Think Big is committed to engaging vendors that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Our Diverse Vendor Program provides equitable access for underrepresented business owners and ensures that everyone without exception has the opportunity to participate in economic growth.