Request for Proposals
Census 2020 Regional Communications Outreach Plan
Submissions Due: 4 p.m. CST, Friday, March 8, 2019

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) is requesting consultant proposals to develop a cohesive overall communications plan to raise public awareness and support regional efforts to obtain an accurate count for the 2020 decennial census. The US Census Bureau has conducted in-depth research on how the American public responds to the census surveys, and has focused considerable research on the hard-to-count population segments. National organizations, including FCCP (Funders Committee for Civic Progress), have also conducted considerable research and developed messaging information for specific target populations. The research from public and private organizations will be available to the selected consultant to inform the preparation of the communications outreach plan.

Maps of the areas within the Kansas City region with higher concentrations of these hard-to-count populations are available at https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/.

The communications plan should include: specific recommendations for framing messages to reach select hard-to-count population groups to both build awareness and to encourage action to complete census surveys; steps to implement plan in the metro area with budget estimates using various media; identification of possible partnerships with area media and other organizations to reach select audiences at modest costs; ways to utilize networks of community organizations; and initial branding and graphic design concepts. The selected consultant would work with a small project team led by MARC public affairs staff to develop the communications plan. The plan should outline ways to build from any promotion planned by the US Census Bureau and offer innovative outreach strategies to promote the importance of a complete count to the public; motivate hard-to-count (HTC) populations to participate in the count; and propose actions that MARC, local governments and others in our community can implement to ensure a quality count. Another challenge with the April 2020 census is the ability to get the public’s attention due to tax season messages and the upcoming presidential election.

At this time, up to $30,000 is available to support the preparation of the strategic communications plan.

**Background**

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts a census of all persons and households. The purpose of the decennial census by the U.S. Constitution is to apportion representation in Congress and distribute federal program dollars among states and localities based on
population numbers. Businesses and industry also decide where to locate new offices, facilities and services based on census data, creating new jobs and promoting economic growth.

As the designated metropolitan planning organization for the Kansas City region, MARC will support local governments in their efforts to ensure a quality census. MARC will form a regional Complete Count Committee (CCC), support formation of local CCCs, engage community partners to promote the 2020 Census, identify and take steps to build public trust in the Census as an important individual responsibility and offer assistance through community partners to improve online response among residents. The decennial census for 2020 will be the first time that residents will be asked to complete the survey online.

The preparation of the communications plan is being supported with funds from the Health Forward Foundation and the REACH Healthcare Foundation.

**Purpose**

The primary purpose of this RFP is to secure expert consultant services to develop an overall communications plan to support Census outreach and communications in the Kansas City region. MARC, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and other partners will implement the plan to support a complete count of all residents in March/April 2020. MARC will assemble a small project team composed of representatives from area organizations knowledgeable about the community and communications planning to work with the selected consultant.

The successful consultant must demonstrate the following qualifications:

- Knowledge of broad-ranging communications strategies, including experience in messaging, tactics and branding to reach and motivate targeted population segments to appropriate actions.
- Knowledge of innovative communications techniques, including greater use of social media.
- Ability to ensure that advertising and media is culturally and linguistically competent.
- Ability to work collaboratively with MARC staff and selected community stakeholders.
- Relationships with area media to explore “partnerships” to expand the reach and reduce the costs to communicate about the Census.
- Ability to complete all project tasks by June 30, 2019.

MARC must receive submittals, either physically at the MARC offices or via electronic mail, by 4:00pm CST, Friday March 8, 2019. MARC will not consider late submittals. Confirmation of receipt of proposals is the responsibility of the submitting entity.
Project Tasks

Task 1. Review existing plans and data
MARC and its project team will work with the consultant to review existing communications’ materials from the US Census Bureau and national organizations, and review information from Complete Count groups in other states and communities. The consultant will have access to a number of resources on the target audiences and messages as well as methods for reaching each target audience most effectively.

The consultant will utilize existing materials to support the design of the outreach plan, the selection of key messages and tactics for paid and other media and work with community organizations to reach the intended audiences to raise awareness and motivate them to take action to complete the census survey.

Task 2. Clarify target audiences
The preparation and implementation of the communications plan is intended to build public understanding and support of the Census, address barriers that prevent undercounted persons from completing Census forms on time and influence decision-making to promote a complete an accurate Census count. Barriers to response include lower trust in government, increased number of residents with limited English proficiency, concern about consequences of responding for undocumented persons, mobility of households, and limited internet access and skills. Consultant recommendations regarding strategies to deliver focused messages to undercounted groups is an important element of this work.

Hard-to-Count (HTC) populations include:

- Young children
- Highly mobile persons, such as renters
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Non-English speakers
- Low-income persons
- Persons experiencing homelessness
- Undocumented immigrants
- Persons who distrust the government
- Persons in the LGBTQ community
- Persons with mental or physical disabilities
- Persons who lack access to Internet services
- Older adults
Task 3. Develop approach to Census 2020 framing, messaging and branding.
The consultant will recommend an overall strategic communications approach, including framing the issues, developing messaging for the general public and hard-to-count audiences, identifying cost-effective message delivery options, branding and creating an overall look-and-feel for graphic design. The consultant will assist MARC and its project team to present the communications plan to the Regional Complete Count Committee. MARC will convene the regional committee for its first meeting on March 22, 2019, and input from the committee is desired in preparation of the final plan. The recommendations will be based on research conducted by public and private organizations available to the consultant, and will complement promotion by the Census Bureau.

Task 4. Prepare and submit final plan
The consultant will prepare a final report that outlines the recommended approach/strategy (including key audiences, messages, message delivery methods, and proposed branding and graphic design) for Census outreach communications. The plan will include elements for earned media, including possible media partnerships; paid media; social media; and use of community partners to deliver messages to stakeholders/clients. It is expected that the plan might identify roles for employers, nonprofit organizations, membership groups, faith-based organizations and others to assist in delivering key messages. The plan will include a budget for use of paid media, printing, giveaway items and other expenses. The consultant will provide vector artwork for all graphics.

Proposal Evaluation
Proposals will be evaluated on qualifications and experience (25%), availability to complete project on schedule (25%), related project examples (20%) and quality of proposed approach (30%). A selection panel will be comprised of MARC staff and project team members.

Consultant Selection/Project Schedule
The following is an outline of the proposed project schedule. The schedule may be modified while refining the contract scope of work after the consultant selection process has been completed.

- Issue RFP...........................................................................................................Friday, February 15, 2019
- All submissions due ...................................................................................... 4:00 pm, March 8, 2019
- Consultant interviews (if applicable) ..............................................................morning, March 13, 2019
- Consultant selected & notified ......................................................................March 18, 2019
- Refine scope of work for contract and Notice to Proceed.............................March 22, 2019
- Submit final report ........................................................................................June 30, 2019
Task Schedule and Deliverables
MARC will work with the selected consultant to finalize a detailed schedule and scope of work, including deliverable products for inclusion in the contract. The deadline to complete all tasks is June 30, 2019.

Proposal Format
Proposal deadline is 4 p.m. CST on Friday, March 8, 2019. Proposals may be submitted via email to Marlene Nagel, Community Development Director (mnagel@marc.org) and to Catherine Couch, Public Affairs Coordinator (ccouch@marc.org). Proposals should not exceed 10 pages (8½ x 11), 12-point font, single space, and should include brief descriptions of prior projects. Examples of previous plans developed may be attached and do not count toward the page total. Resumes of key staff may be attached and do not count toward the page total.

Consultants are required to address the following items in your response:

Description of the Firm or Individual offering Services. Describe the firm offering to provide services to MARC, including type of business, date business was established, type of services provided, and description of client base. If an individual, provide background on experience, education and skills necessary to perform the required services. Describe expertise in understanding and using communications means to reach diverse and hard-to-reach population segments.

Description of Project Approach. Describe the consultant’s approach to working with MARC staff, project partners and the Regional Complete Count Committee to carry out the project. The consultant should address how each task on pages 3-4 will be addressed.

Description of Similar Projects. Describe previous projects with similar needs. MARC is interested in examples of how the contractor worked with clients to produce relevant communications and outreach plans.

Client References for Similar Projects. Provide three references of clients where services were similar to those requested by MARC.

Description and Qualifications of Firm’s Personnel. Describe qualifications of personnel who would be assigned to the project, including information on their experience with work similar to that required by MARC.

Fee Schedule. Outline the anticipated fee schedule for staff time that your firm is expected to use for this engagement. Indicate if the consultant is able to offer any contributed services toward this project, and a general description of what services might be offered as in-kind support.
**Availability.** Indicate the firm or individual’s availability to work on this project and complete it on time.

**Project Schedule and Budget**
It is anticipated that the work could begin as early on or before March 22, 2019. MARC has budgeted $30,000 for this engagement.

**Award of Contract**
This request for qualifications does not commit the Mid-America Regional Council to award a contract or to pay costs incurred in the preparation of a proposal in response to this request. MARC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received as a result of this request, or to cancel any or all of this Request for Qualifications, if it is considered in the best interest of MARC. MARC may require the proposer selected to participate in negotiations, and to submit to such price, technical or other information as may be needed to finalize a contract.