ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP of NORTH CAROLINA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL for Advertising Services for the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

Proposals are due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, December 11, 2026

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Request for Proposal for Advertising Services for the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

Overview

The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (hereinafter referred to as "EDPNC") is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation that serves as the state's primary statewide economic development, sales, and marketing organization. Governed by an 18-member board of business and industry leaders from across North Carolina, EDPNC focuses on business and job recruitment, existing industry support, international trade, tourism, and film marketing. EDPNC, which operates under contract with the North Carolina Department of Commerce, works closely with many public- and private-sector partners at the state, regional and local levels. Headquartered in the state's capital, Raleigh, EDPNC is funded by the State of North Carolina, while receiving additional financial support from the private sector.

EDPNC is now undertaking a search for a new agency of record for advertising services. The organization does not currently have an incumbent agency of record. EDPNC has recently received increased funding for economic development marketing for the current fiscal year (ending June 30, 2027) via budget allocation from the North Carolina legislature. While this increase in its annual marketing budget is not yet recurring, it is hoped that the legislature will budget it as a recurring budget item for future years. EDPNC has contracted with an agency on an interim basis to place its current media plan, which is effective through September 2027. The selected agency partner will immediately begin work developing future media strategies and tactics.

While Visit North Carolina, the state's official state destination marketing organization, is a component of EDPNC and works closely with the rest of the EDPNC team, the scope of this agency review does not include state tourism marketing.

EDPNC utilizes a variety of paid and earned media vehicles to drive awareness of North Carolina as a premier location for economic development, including print,

digital, video, social media, and public relations. However, public relations, event marketing, SEO, and website development are not components of this review.

This is not a mandated review.

A. Review Schedule

1. Responses to this RFP are due by close of business (5:00 PM EST) on **Friday, December 11, 2026**. Please see delivery instructions for additional details.
2. Finalists will be selected to present their qualifications and demonstrate their strategic thinking via a creative assignment in-person to representatives of EDPNC in Raleigh in late January 2027.
3. Selection of a partner will occur no later than mid-February 2027 but will be dependent upon final contract approval by EDPNC.
4. The selected firm will be expected to begin work by March 1, 2027, with new creative expected in the market by May 2027.

B. Summary of the Scope of Work for Advertising Services

1. Strategic media and creative recommendations, including the development and presentation of a detailed annual advertising plan.
2. Research, planning, negotiation, and placement of media and any related added-value programs and related traffic of creative.
3. Development and production of strategic, results-driven creative.
4. Development and placement of paid social ads and organic evergreen social ads, and creation of a content calendar.
5. Management of the production of various creative concepts and delivery to media vehicles as required.
6. Deployment and reporting of appropriate analytical tools for measuring the impact of media strategies and tactics.
7. The scope of work does not include public relations, international marketing, website development and maintenance, or SEO.
8. EDPNC is open to the possibility of selecting separate partners for creative and media development and execution.

C. Expectations of the Advertising Partner

The selected advertising partner for EDPNC is expected to:

1. Assign a single point of contact that will collaborate directly with EDPNC staff and provide consistent, responsive service. This account service contact should have exceptional management and organizational skills.
2. Be knowledgeable about national and regional economic development trends and immerse themselves in EDPNC organizational structure and processes.
3. Manage the established EDPNC brand through messaging and media which are in alignment with and in support of the brand.
4. Demonstrate flexibility as external environmental conditions warrant.
5. Possess the ability to learn from mistakes and build upon successes and opportunities.
6. Provide post-buy analyses and audits of advertising campaigns upon request.
7. Working with EDPNC staff, develop measurable goals and objectives in the formulation of the annual advertising plan.
8. Be expert in and provide regular tracking of the effectiveness of advertising vehicles through related analytics.
9. Respond to and evaluate unsolicited media opportunities.
10. Make strategic advertising recommendations as part of an annual plan prior to the start of each fiscal year (July 1). These recommendations should include media, creative, and the budget required for execution.
11. Produce accurate, properly itemized, and timely invoices, inclusive of detailed supporting documentation, for the execution of services. Invoices will be generated monthly and will carry terms of no less than thirty (30) days net. All credits for media campaigns already executed will be expected to be reported to EDPNC on a timely basis.
12. Provide a written monthly status report to EDPNC for all current projects.
13. Produce written estimates for any project authorized by EDPNC in advance of any work on that project.
14. Disclose all discounts and special offers provided by vendors that the agency uses to execute the approved plan of work.

15. Collaborate with any other marketing partners of EDPNC and its in-house creative services team as needed.
16. Respond to any special needs of EDPNC as requested.

D. Budget and Terms of Contract

EDPNC received $13 million in additional non-recurring marketing funds for the current fiscal year ending June 30. $10 million of this amount is invested in media running through September 2027. $450,000 has been allocated for onboarding and creative development this fiscal year once the new creative partner has been selected. This figure does not include agency fees. The media budget for the next fiscal year has yet to be determined.

The selected partner(s) will be responsible for submitting an annual plan and budget which includes the costs for the following:

1. Media planning, negotiation, placement, and measurement.
2. Creative development and production, as dictated by the annual media plan.
3. Professional fees, including all reasonable and usual costs to service the account. This includes but is not limited to travel expenses, postage and express delivery, telephone, fax transmissions, and copies. Such regular out-of-pocket costs to service the account should ultimately be included in the professional fee and ideally will not be billed separately to the client.

Terms of the contract between its partner(s) and EDPNC will be negotiated annually. Both parties will be required to give 90 days' written notice if either wishes to terminate the contract prior to its expiration.

E. Desired Characteristics of EDPNC's Advertising Partners

The following characteristics are listed in no particular order and are not exhaustive, but should be considered a guide to the kind of partners sought by EDPNC:

1. The ability to think strategically and employ that strategic insight across all media and creative executions consistently and efficiently.

2. A management environment of a unified team, fully understanding the special character of North Carolina and the standards and expectations of EDPNC.
3. The capability to identify changes in target audience behavior and the competitive landscape and proactively make recommendations in strategy and tactics in response to such changes.
4. The financial resources and creditworthiness to plan, purchase, and make payments for all media purchased on behalf of EDPNC.
5. Access to and knowledge of relevant media research tools.
6. Expertise with analytical tools for measuring the results generated by media deployed for EDPNC
7. The expertise to evaluate, recommend, and produce integrated marketing communications across a variety of platforms.
8. The creativity and initiative to identify, recommend, and execute non-traditional marketing ideas that advance EDPNC's business objectives.
9. Current or prior experience in the economic development category is desired. At a minimum, however, firms should have some experience with place marketing.
10. EDPNC is not obligated to hire a North Carolina-based agency. However, agencies located outside of North Carolina must demonstrate knowledge of the state and be prepared to show how they will gain that knowledge and service the account. EDPNC's work depends on authentically representing North Carolina's communities, industries, workforce, and quality of life to our key audiences. We value agency teams who bring firsthand knowledge of the state and a track record of work here. Proposers will therefore be evaluated partially on the depth of North Carolina experience and presence among the people who will work on this account.

F. Conflicts of Interest

EDPNC will determine if a conflict of interest exists among entities with which the agency has current and future relationships. Such conflicts of interest are generally considered to be other southeast and mid-Atlantic U.S. states. The existence of any such relationships (either as agency of record or project-based) does not necessarily create a conflict of interest. However, the agency will be expected to disclose

immediately any economic development-related entities with which it has a relationship. EDPNC will make the final determination as to whether a conflict of interest exists now or in the future.

G. Required Contents of the Response

The firm(s) selected as EDPNC's advertising partner(s) will consistently distinguish themselves from other firms during this process. The response should address the following requests for information:

1. Firm Profile

a. The number of years the firm has been in business providing the services requested.
b. The number of full-time employees employed by the firm.
c. The firm's policy regarding remote work by its employees.
d. Annual capitalized billings of the firm in the most recently completed fiscal year of operation.
e. A profit-and-loss statement for the agency for the most recent fiscal year just completed. If such information is considered proprietary and confidential, it should be marked as such.
f. Disclosure of any pending litigation against the firm, and whether such litigation would hinder the ability to perform to the client's expectations. Proposing firms must be free from any legal covenants and restrictions that would prevent them from accepting this business.
g. Brief biographical information for agency staff to be assigned to the client.
h. Three (3) references, including name, telephone number, and email address for reference contacts. The references should state the nature of the relationship with the firm.
i. Detail any subcontractors or partnerships that will be used to service the EDPNC account. The status of any vendors used to fulfill the needs of the account (freelance, contractor, strategic partner, etc.), the reasons why the

external resource will be part of the account team, and the terms of the subcontract for this work on the EDPNC account should be clearly identified.

2. Experience

a. Describe any prior experience in the economic development sector, particularly destination marketing organizations. Any relevant sector experience should be noted as to whether it is held by the firm itself or by employees while employed at other organizations. Please note the years in which that category experience was gained by the firm.
b. List any current business relationships the firm has in the economic development category.
c. Provide a complete list of all current paid and pro bono clients of the firm, and the length of service to those clients.

3. Approach to the Business

a. Describe the firm's approach to understanding a new client's business and how the firm would spend its first 90 days working with EDPNC.
b. Describe the process the agency typically undertakes to initiate a major new campaign for a client, from strategy to concept to execution.
c. Provide an example of the work of which you are most proud. This work does not necessarily have to be from the economic development or place marketing category. Explain why the example represents a success story for the firm and the benefits it generated for the client.
d. Provide a case study that demonstrates the agency's ability to drive the client's business and represents how you applied insights, learning, research, and analytics to the strategic process. This example should demonstrate how the agency measured results and tracked the success of a campaign.

H. Fee Proposals

1. Please provide specific and separate professional fee proposals for executing an annual plan of work for EDPNC for (1) media services, and/or (2) creative development and execution. EDPNC prefers a monthly fee retainer structure that

is inclusive of services as described within this RFP, with net media billed to the client. Any proposed arrangement should avoid "open-ended" fees whenever possible and should be based upon a reasonable expectation for a specific plan of work. The proposed fees should be based upon a 12-month plan of work.

2. The proposed fee should be exclusive of creative production expenses (related to the hard costs of production) and other similar non-recurring costs. However, please note how production costs are typically billed to the client (e.g., a percentage of production costs invoiced upfront, any markups, etc.).
3. Expenses for items such as copies, overnight delivery, telephone, postage, regular supplies, expected travel, etc. should be included in the fee.
4. The final selection of the advertising partner is subject to negotiation and a review of proposed terms and conditions of contract. All parts of the proposal are considered negotiable.

I. RFP Response Specifications

1. The response should be no more than 35 pages. Responses should be in a format that is easy to read and user-friendly. Please number pages wherever possible. If examples of creative are provided as a component of the response, they can be linked to online and not count towards the page count.
2. Responses received must be final and complete. No addenda or revisions will be accepted after the agency response is received.

J. Other Important Information

1. Once finalists have been selected, those firms will be invited to present to EDPNC staff. Finalists will be asked to present an assignment that provides an overview of the firm's capabilities and their ability to think strategically and creatively while demonstrating their fit with the client.
2. Participating firms will not be compensated for any expenses related to their participation in the review process.
3. Any comments made verbally or in written form outside the content of submitted responses and presentations to EDPNC staff and board members, partners, or

elected officials will not be considered as a part of or a demonstration of a firm's qualifications. Lobbying of these same audiences is not encouraged and may negatively impact the consideration of a firm. All communications during the review process should go through EDPNC's consultant, Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group, via email at ccavanaugh@magellanstrategy.com.

4. EDPNC is not obligated to select the lowest cost fee proposal.
5. EDPNC may choose to suspend or terminate the review process at any time for any reason.
6. Because EDPNC is in part taxpayer-funded, its communications are subject to open records laws of the State of North Carolina. This includes proposals submitted by interested firms. However, participating firms will not otherwise be identified.

K. Delivery Instructions

Proposals are due by 5:00 PM EST on **December 11, 2026**, and should be sent to Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group via email. Please use a file sharing service or other platform for large files.

L. Questions

Questions related to the RFP should be directed by email no later than 5:00 PM EST on **Friday, November 20, 2026,** to EDPNC's review consultant, Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group, at ccavanaugh@magellanstrategy.com. Questions and responses will be shared with interested firms. Firms submitting questions will not be identified.