

Request for Proposals Strategic Communications and Engagement Plan

Organizational background

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) is a local unit of government responsible for managing and protecting the water resources in one of the largest and most heavily-used urban watersheds in Minnesota. MCWD's mission is to collaborate with public and private partners to protect and improve land and water for current and future generations. Partnerships are key to the success of its work.

The watershed stretches 178-square miles across the western Twin Cities metro and includes all or part of 29 cities from the rural communities of St. Bonifacius and Minnetrista, and the suburban communities of Hopkins and St. Louis Park, to the urban neighborhoods of south Minneapolis. It has 129 lakes (including Lake Minnetonka and the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes), eight major creeks (including its namesake Minnehaha Creek), Minnehaha Falls, and thousands of wetlands.

MCWD's primary business functions are:

- Developing, building and maintaining water improvement projects
- Issuing permits for construction activities
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Increasing awareness about the MCWD and water quality issues
- Educating its stakeholders

In Minnesota, watershed districts' work is guided by a watershed management plan that must be submitted to the state for approval every ten years. MCWD's current plan was approved in 2017 and represents a significant shift in direction from previous plans. It identifies the strategic priorities of building high-impact capital projects to improve water quality and ecological integrity, and changing local and regional policy to better integrate land use and water planning. Additionally, MCWD's work is focused in areas poised to deliver the most water quality benefit to the watershed. Current focus areas are the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Subwatershed, which is the region furthest upstream in the watershed, and the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed, which is the region farthest downstream. A program is also being developed to be responsive to needs in other areas across the watershed.

While MCWD's Watershed Management Plan was adopted with the overwhelming support of its communities, it needs the ongoing support of key stakeholders to ensure long-term success.

We collaborate with public and private partners to protect and improve land and water for current and future generations.



Project overview

MCWD seeks a qualified communications consultant to develop a three-year strategic communications and engagement plan to help it achieve its strategic priorities, solidify support for its focused/responsive approach, and reinforce its brand. The plan will use communications strategies for conveying relevant messages to key audiences across multiple platforms, and engagement activities that involve and inform key stakeholders in its work. The strategic communications and engagement plan is envisioned as a framework for the implementation of work by all MCWD staff in addition to communications.

The communications consultant will conduct audience research which will then provide direction on the strategies and activities that will be most effective at achieving the desired goals. The audience research will also inform the redesign of MCWD's website, which is a separate project not included in the scope of this work. Preliminary work on the website design will begin in the latter half of 2019 and the build is planned in 2020.

Scope of work

The project is divided into two phases: research and planning.

Research

The first three months will involve gaining a full understanding of the MCWD and of the challenges and opportunities the MCWD faces in pursuing its goals. This work will include the following:

- Review MCWD's guiding documents
- Review past audits of stakeholders
- Assess stakeholders' current perceptions and needs (interviews, surveys, etc.)
 - External audiences
 - Government officials (elected/appointed/staff)
 - Real estate developers
 - Internal audiences
 - Staff
 - Board of Managers
 - Citizens Advisory Committee

Planning

After completing the research phase, the consultant will spend the next three months working with the project manager and review committee to build the plan. The last month of the process will involve working with the project manager to present the plan for approval to the MCWD Board and Citizens Advisory Committee.

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The planning process will result in a strategic communications and engagement plan that includes goals and audiences (which may be refined based on the information gained during the research phase), measurable objectives, strategies and tactics (including communications and engagement activities), key messages, a timeline, evaluation methods, and estimated staff and financial resources needed for implementation. Results are further outlined in the Deliverables section.

Project goals

The MCWD's strategic communications and engagement plan will ensure the success of the organization's strategic priorities by achieving the following goals:

1. The MCWD has the support and assistance of local and state officials for its major capital project initiatives
2. The MCWD has the support and cooperation of local government officials and developers for early coordination on land use change
3. The MCWD receives more funding and leverages more partnership contributions for its capital projects, operations and programs
4. The MCWD's responsive model has the support of its key stakeholders across the District, especially those outside the Six Mile Creek – Halsted Bay and Minnehaha Creek subwatersheds
5. The MCWD is perceived by its key stakeholders and the general public as a credible, transparent, and responsive agency that adds value in its communities

Target audiences

The primary audiences of the strategic communications and engagement plan are government officials (elected/appointed policymakers and key staff) and real estate developers. The other key stakeholders listed here are also integral to the accomplishment of one or more of the plans' goals. They are categorized according to the anticipated level of MCWD's commitment to outreach and/or engagement with these audiences.

Actively engage

Internal

- MCWD staff
- MCWD Board of Managers

External

- Government officials
 - Elected and appointed policymakers
 - Key agency staff
- Real estate developers

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- Property owners in the Minnehaha Creek and Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Subwatersheds
 - Homeowners
 - Business owners
 - Community Institutions (hospitals, faith groups, etc.)

Actively inform

Internal

- MCWD Citizen Advisory Committee

External

- Partner organizations
- Interested Public
 - Lake associations
 - Neighborhood leaders
 - Residents living near projects
 - Trained volunteers
- Media

Passively inform

- Property owners outside the Minnehaha Creek and Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Subwatersheds
 - Homeowners
 - Business owners
 - Community Institutions (hospitals, faith groups, etc.)
- Water-based recreation enthusiasts
- General public

Project deliverables

1. A detailed report on the current perceptions and needs of MCWD internal and external stakeholders
2. A three-year strategic communications and engagement plan that includes measurable objectives, strategies and tactics for each of the goals of the plan. They must include communications and engagement activities that are prioritized and phased in over the duration of the plan. The plan will include the following elements:
 - a. Goals
 - b. Audiences
 - c. Measurable objectives
 - d. Strategies and tactics
 - e. Key messages
 - f. Timeline
 - g. Method of evaluation
3. Estimated costs for implementation of the plan, including staff and financial resources

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Budget

Proposals for the scope of work outlined above must not exceed \$50,000. Proposed costs will be an important consideration during review of the RFP submissions.

MCWD plans to implement the plan with existing staff and has limited funds for engaging outside assistance in implementation. The strategic communications and engagement plan must include estimated costs of implementing the plan, and ensure suggestions are realistic for available budget and staffing resources.

Timeline

A review committee led by the project manager, MCWD's Communications and Education Manager Telly Mamayek, along with select staff and MCWD board members will evaluate all proposals and recommend a consultant to the MCWD Board of Managers. The review committee will continue to be engaged at key milestones during the project for review.

The anticipated timeline for this project, which is subject to change, is as follows:

- Deadline for receipt of requests for proposals: 4:30pm (CST), Friday, April 5, 2019
- Interviews: Wednesday, April 17 and/or Thursday, April 18, 2019
- Consultant selection and contract approval: Thursday, April 25, 2019
- Research phase completed and report issued by: August 9, 2019
- Planning phase and staff review completed by: November 8, 2019
- Board review and adoption of the plan by: December 19, 2019

Selection criteria

Methodology

1. Project understanding: The consultant understands the scope, goals and requirements of the project, and must be willing to work closely with MCWD staff.
2. Completeness and specificity: The proposal explains what the consultant will do to meet all facets of the project, including coordinating with the project manager and review team, conducting research, and developing the plan.
3. Identification of needs: The proposal outlines what resources will be required to complete the tasks, including MCWD staff time, additional information, etc.

Experience

1. Experience in developing strategic communications plans for public agencies. Previous work with environmental organizations is preferred.
 - a. Company experience on projects that are directly related to the proposed project
 - b. Project team members' qualifications and work experience

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2. The selected communications consultant must demonstrate a high degree of expertise in the following areas:
 - a. Strategic communications planning
 - b. Marketing strategy
 - c. Community engagement
 - d. Social media strategy
 - e. Media relations
 - f. Creative services including branding, graphic design, copywriting, and production

Cost

1. Fee structure: The proposal must clearly outline the fees and costs to complete all aspects of this project

Submission requirements

Proposals should be 15 pages or less, not including work samples. Work samples must be included in an appendix of 20 pages or less.

Proposals must be submitted electronically and include:

- Company background
 - Brief description of the company and its services
 - Description of work with environmental organizations and/or local government agencies with needs similar to MCWD
- Qualifications
 - Contact information and resume for designated project manager
 - Resume and credentials of members of project team
 - References (contact person and phone number) for at least three clients
- Proposed scope of work
 - Recommended approach for developing the plan, including methodology of coordinating with MCWD project manager and review team
 - Preliminary thoughts on MCWD strategy to achieve project goals
 - Cost/fee structure
- Work samples
 - Examples of past plans or strategies developed for organizations similar to MCWD
 - Limit work samples portion of the submission to no more than 20 pages

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Proposals must be submitted electronically. No paper submissions will be accepted or considered. Final deadline for submissions is **4:30 p.m. Friday, April 5, 2019**; all respondents will receive an email confirmation of receipt. Finalist interviews will be conducted on Wednesday, April 17 and/or Thursday, April 18, 2019.

Project contact

All questions and proposals should be directed to:

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