

# Request for Proposal

**BRANDING, MARKETING AND WEBSITE ASSESSMENT**

**COLUMBIA COLLEGE**

Proposals due by: January 3, 2022

Prepared by:  
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1001 Rogers Street  
Columbia, MO 65216

Date Issued: December 1, 2021

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# NOTICE TO RESPONDENTS

Columbia College requests proposals for the assessment of **Branding, Marketing and Website**, which will be received until **January 3, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. (CT)**. **The College assumes no responsibility for any respondent's on-time receipt at the designated location for proposal opening.**

If you have any questions regarding the RFP, please send them to:

*Anh Braddock  
Director of Web & Digital Marketing  
Columbia College  
1001 Rogers Street  
Columbia, MO 65216  
573-875-7569  
atbraddock1@ccis.edu*

**All questions regarding the RFP must be received no later than December 10, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. (CT).**

After the submission deadline, any modification by the respondent of the specifications provided will be ignored, and the original wording of the RFP shall be the prevailing document.

The College reserves the right to waive any informality in Request for Proposals and to reject any or all Request for Proposals.

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# GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

## Liability

The issuance of this document and the receipt of information in response to this document will not cause Columbia College to incur any liability or obligation to the respondents, financial or otherwise. Columbia College assumes no obligation to reimburse or in any way compensate the respondents for expenses incurred concerning the response to this RFP or participation in this process.

## Governing Laws and Regulations

Any contract issued as a result of this RFP shall be construed according to the laws of the State of Missouri. Additionally, the contractor shall comply with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations related to the performance of the contract to the extent that the same may be applicable.

## Taxes

The contractor shall assume and pay all taxes and contributions including, but not limited to, State, Federal and Municipal which are payable by virtue of the furnishing and delivery of item(s) specified herein. Materials and services furnished the College are not subject to either Federal Excise Taxes or Missouri Sales Tax.

## Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination

In connection with the furnishing of equipment, supplies, and/or services under the contract, the contractor and all subcontractors shall agree not to discriminate against any recipients of services, or employees or applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran status. The contractor shall comply with federal laws, rules, and regulations applicable to subcontractors of government contracts including those relating to equal employment of minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and certain veterans. Contract clauses required by the United States Government in such circumstances are incorporated herein by reference.

## Inventions, Patents, and Copyrights

The contractor shall pay for all royalties, license fees, patent or invention rights, or copyrights and defend all suits or claims for infringements of any patent or invention right or copyrights involved in the items furnished hereunder. The contractor shall defend, protect, and hold harmless the College its officers, agents, and employees against all suits of law or in equity resulting from patent and or copyright infringement concerning the contractor's performance or products produced under the terms of the contract.

Copyrights for any item developed for the College shall be the property of the College and inure to its benefit and the contractor shall execute such documents as the College may require for the perfection thereof.

## Gifts

The respondent shall refrain in offering any offers of gifts to the College, and all Columbia College's employees.

## Single Point of Contact

It is Columbia College's intent to provide a fair opportunity for each respondent invited to participate in this RFP process. To ensure the same information is delivered to every potential respondent, the college has established one point of contact for the RFP process. The contact information is as follows:

Anh Braddock  
Director of Web & Digital Marketing  
Columbia College  
1001 Rogers Street  
Columbia, MO 65216  
Phone: (573) 875-7569  
Email: atbraddock1@ccis.edu

To ensure timely and adequate consideration of your proposal, respondents are asked to limit all contact, whether verbal or written, pertaining to this RFP to the designated representative for the duration of this RFP process.

If a respondent does not understand any portion of the RFP or has questions about the RFP requirements or process, it is that respondent's responsibility to request elaboration or clarification from Columbia College in writing. Questions must be submitted via e-mail to Anh Braddock no later than 5 p.m. CST December 10, 2021. Questions will be consolidated, answered and sent via e-mail to all respondents by noon December 15, 2021.

Without exception, the deadline for submission of completed proposals is 5 p.m. CST January 3, 2022. The respondent is required to submit one hardcopy (via U.S. mail) and one electronic copy (via e-mail) of its proposal in response to this RFP to Anh Braddock. Any deviation from these instructions may lead to respondent dismissal from this process.

## RFP Criteria

When developing a proposal, please be aware of the criteria below:

- All documents and materials submitted in response to this RFP will become the property of Columbia College unless otherwise requested by a respondent at the time of submission.
- Responses should be tailored specifically to respond to the requirements set forth in this RFP. It is essential that the response be thorough, brief and concise. Avoid broad, unenforceable or immeasurable responses. Proposals that deviate from the requested format may be classified as non-responsive and be disqualified from further consideration.
- High-level sales material and collateral should not be used within the body of the response. Please attach such material in a separate appendix if desired.
- Pricing information supplied in response to the RFP must be valid for at least 180 days from the submission date. If a respondent is reserving the option to withdraw the pricing during that period, please clearly state such in the response.
- All project offerings and terms must be included in this document and not as a negotiation point later in the RFP process. This document serves as your best offer/bid for Columbia College. Any acceptance of a proposal is contingent upon the execution of a written agreement and Columbia College shall not be contractually bound to any respondent prior to the execution of such written agreement.
- Although not anticipated, should Columbia College need to change or revoke this RFP it reserves the right to do so without liability and will promptly notify all respondents accordingly.
- This RFP represents the best effort of Columbia College to document its requirements. Columbia College reserves the right to adjust the specifications or scope stated in this RFP.

# OBJECTIVES & SCOPE OF PROJECT

Columbia College is a private, non-profit liberal arts and sciences college. We provide high-quality programs, offering associate, bachelor's and master's degrees designed to meet the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Our main campus in Columbia, Missouri, serves traditional students, as well as working adults through our evening program. We also have [38+ locations](#) in 14 states and Cuba, primarily serving working adults through online, virtual or evening in-seat classes. Many of our locations are on [military installations](#), serving those who serve us, and their families.

The college is a nonsectarian school that welcomes all students regardless of religious affiliations. We are affiliated by covenant with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The college is not owned by the church, rather it merely holds an affiliation.

## Project Overview

Columbia College has been helping students advance their lives through education for more than 160 years, and has a history of providing education to the underserved. The college started serving non-traditional students over 40 years ago, and is one of the first to be located on a military installation. We were also one of the first institutions to embark on providing education to working adults via online classes and we have been a leader in online education for the past 20 years. With 38+ satellite locations nationwide and a fully serviced online modality, we are capable of providing quality education to anyone through various venues: online, in-seat or virtually.

Over the past 10 years, enrollment at Columbia College has been declining rapidly. Externally, the higher education market has drastically changed during this time, and only accelerated with COVID and the need for institutions to provide virtual and online classes. With more competitors competing for the same audience, and now with the same modalities - Columbia College needs to understand the roots of our decline in enrollment over the previous 10 years and find ways to stabilize and increase enrollment overall.

## Objectives

- i. Assess the effectiveness of the current brand architecture and marketing strategy in reaching our target audiences
- ii. Identify the root causes and/or contributing factors of the decline in enrollment and outline a strategy to stabilize/reverse the trend
- iii. Assess our public website (ccis.edu) and other related domains in order to improve user experience throughout their enrollment journey

# Scope of Work

## **Phase 1: Assessment**

- Facilitate primary research to:
  - identify the root causes and/or contributing factors of the decline in enrollment
  - identify who our target audiences should be and what important messages that resonate most with each of them
  - understand the effectiveness of the current brand architecture in reaching said target audiences across all Columbia College's venues and modalities
- Evaluate and assess our current marketing/communications messaging and creative including print, digital (web, email, social media, display and video advertising), audio, video and other communications targeting internal and external audiences to understand our image, perception and reputation regionally where we have locations<sup>1</sup> and nationwide.
- Audit our public website ([ccis.edu](http://ccis.edu)) and other related domains (TargetX, [CougarTrack](#), [ColumbiaCougars](#)) to identify areas of improvement in user experience for (1) prospective students/families, (2) current students and (3) alumni.

## **Phase 2: Brand Architecture/Identity and Website Framework**

Based on the results of Phase 1:

- If the current brand is working:
  - Present an elevated brand architecture, core brand positioning statements and 2-3 distinct creative concepts/expressions based on the current brand that resonates with target audiences
- If the current brand is NOT working:
  - Present a new brand architecture that includes brand promise, brand rationale, brand personality, essence, voice (tone/positioning), set of core brand positioning statements that capture the unique attributes and value of the College for use across broad communication platforms
  - Present 2-3 distinct creative concepts/expressions to capture the above brand framework with strategic rationales
- Present a website journey framework that will enhance user experience for (1) prospective students/families to drive them toward enrollment more seamlessly; for (2) current students to retain them until the end of their education journey; and for (3) alumni to nurture relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Missouri is where our main campus is located. It also has the most satellite locations across the nation. We would like to understand where we stand as a whole in Mid-Missouri, Missouri and nationwide.



## Budget & Target Deliverable Schedule

**Final Project Due:** April 30, 2022 (to complete Phase 1)

If this date needs to be adjusted, please include your readjusted proposed date, as well as your reasoning for shifting the schedule. All proposed date changes will be considered.

**Budget range:** \$50 - 300K (higher range should include strategy implementation)

## Existing Roadblocks or Technical Issues

- The Enrollment Management and Marketing Division does not control 100% of the enrollment funnel but is responsible for moving students from suspect/prospect phase to enrollment.
- We have human resource constraints at most levels within the division and college.
- Our website was recently redesigned and restructured so we are not ready or have enough resources to go through a complete website overhaul. All website development has been done in-house but we are open to professional services and/or staff augmentation that may be necessary for any site restructuring recommendations.
- Our centralized marketing team is at capacity with projects for the institution overall, and for each location. We are open to professional services and/or staff augmentation that may be necessary for any recommendations.
- This project will have a tight turnaround timeline as we must move quickly to identify root causes and activate any new strategies. We expect to have the brand architecture assessment, market research and website audit done within three months.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS

## What We're Looking for in Potential Vendors

Columbia College is looking for a partner who has a wealth of knowledge and experience in the higher education industry, especially with reaching the working adult/military audience. The ideal partner must be able to provide objective, in-depth SWOT analysis of Columbia College across all of our markets; and a comprehensive strategy to position us as the top choice for our target audiences.

Throughout the length of the project, Columbia College expects transparency and regular communication from our partner in regards to project progress, updates, shortcomings and roadblocks. Our ideal partner will be able to lay out a comprehensive plan that includes the strategy AND timeline of when we can expect certain results.

As a large institution with various modalities and target audiences, Columbia College requires out-of-the-box solutions instead of cookie-cutter approach. We are data-driven, and we expect our partner to provide data and analysis for all recommendations.

# Evaluation Criteria

Columbia College will evaluate respondents and proposals based on the following criteria:

Experience – Technical expertise – Transparency – Responsiveness – Projected costs

Experience in:

- conducting brand assessment across multiple regions and nationwide with different audiences
- providing comprehensive analysis based on both quantitative and qualitative results to back up any proposed strategies
- implementing the scope of projects with cost-effective methods
- prioritizing UX, UI and accessibility best practices to integrate website journey (specifically with Sitecore CMS, TargetX and Salesforce) into full enrollment funnel
- strategizing and executing comprehensive marketing strategy cross channels, across multiple regions and nationwide with different audiences

Ability to:

- address current and future challenges with the proposed plan, assist in gathering organizational buy-in and support from various stakeholders
- provide data-informed reasons for all parts of the proposed plan; transparency in pricing model, methods, tactics, etc...
- work with the current website infrastructure to enhance website experience for the target audiences
- provide a roadmap with potential benchmarks for continual assessment of the plan

Please provide samples and/or case studies from previous projects that showcase your qualifications based on the criteria above.

## Questions Respondents Must Answer to Be Considered

- i. Columbia College is proud to provide high quality education to working adults/military audience and allow them to choose the modality that fit within their schedule - whether it's online, virtual or in-seat. With 38+ locations nationwide and a large online-only student body, how would you go about assessing our market competitiveness and our brand effectiveness across various regions and nationwide?
- ii. What issues you can see up front or how will you overcome those to meet a tight deadline?
- iii. Due to COVID, many institutions now enter the online education market and compete for the same working adults we are trying to attract. How would you elevate and position our brand as the top choice for this audience?
- iv. Please share a strategy you implemented for a client but the results were not ideal or as you expected? Did you have a chance to solve that and how?
- v. How do you find differentiators and provide unique services while working with similar higher education institutions and competitors.

# Submission Requirements

Please submit the following information with your proposal:

## Company Information

### Company History

- In what year and how was your company founded?
- Detail the present number of full-time, part-time and total employees and percent of companywide employee turnover during the past 24 months

### Financial Information

What is your average account size? Please list your top three clients based on revenue earned in 2021 and include client/industry, duration of client relationship, account size in dollars and the types of services you provide each client. If revenue is sensitive, please supply a scale and complete the remaining data as requested. If needed, industry categories may be supplied in lieu of client names.

Please list the last three clients your company has lost for reasons other than acquisition/consolidation. Please describe services provided to clients and the reasons your company lost the client.

If your proposal is a successful bidder, what percentage of your business will the Columbia College contract represent?

### Conflicts of interest

Does your company have any conflicts of interest if awarded the Columbia College account? Do you know, are related to, or have done business with anyone currently employed at Columbia College? Please note that failure to disclose any relevant conflicts may lead to dismissal from this RFP process and/or termination of contract if conflicts are identified after the program is awarded to your company.

### Pending Legal Action

Is there any legal action currently pending against your organization? If yes, please describe the nature of the complaint.

### Judgments

Has there been a judgment entered against your organization in the last two years? If yes, please provide the date the judgment was entered, case number, court of jurisdiction and amount of judgment.

## Account Support

### Contacts and Qualifications

If awarded the contract, identify your company's primary contact along with any other secondary contacts for the Columbia College account. For each individual, include title, account experience and length of time employed with your company. Only list account team members that will have regular contact with Columbia College.

### Communication with Columbia College

Fully explain how each point of contact would interact with Columbia College (i.e., e-mail, U.S. mail, phone, fax, Internet, etc.) and at what frequency.

### Presentations

Columbia College may request respondents(s) to give in-person and/or virtual presentations. After the opening of RFP and scoring of respondent responses, we will email the selected vendors to assign a date and time. Selected respondents will provide an overview of the firm's core strengths, expertise and ability to meet the scope of work including examples of primary research, development of brand architectures/frameworks and creative strategies that align with the scope of work.

### Hours of Service

Please provide your hours of operation and time zone.

### Value-added Services

Please list all of the value-added services and funding you would provide Columbia College, e.g., assistance in design, layout, etc. Provide your best value-added and funded services in this section, and be as thorough as possible in your offerings.

### Client Process

Explain how the on-boarding process will work for Columbia College. Include details on the type and frequency of contact between your company and Columbia College throughout the project.

Describe your procedures for monitoring the project to ensure milestones are assessed regularly. Include details about how this information is communicated to the client.

## Pricing

Disclaimer: Due to the dynamic nature of business operations and economic trends, Columbia College reserves the right to delete locations and/or decrease total expenditures from the project as needed with no change in pricing or discount without negotiations and contract changes.

### Percentage Discount

Based on the account details stated in the introduction, what is the best pricing schedule your company is willing to offer to Columbia College? Please explain all options you are offering.

### Account Management Charges

Explain all special account management charges that would be billed to Columbia College by your company. Include all fees (i.e., artwork production fees, artwork change fees, 3235s, etc.).

### Payment Terms

What would the payment timeline terms be for Columbia College? Do you accept payment of invoices by American Express through our touchless accounts payable payment process?

### Example Forms

Please attach examples of all client paperwork, such as an invoice and order form.

## Billing and Reports

### Billing

Do you provide itemized billing?

Do you apply any surcharges? If so, please disclose all additional fees.

Please describe your specific and all-encompassing billing terms offered to Columbia College.

### Reports

Please list all reporting capabilities you can provide Columbia College that are relevant to this scope of

What other reports and/or services you offer that differentiate you from your competitors? Be specific about how these reports/services may provide Columbia College with increased advantage in selecting you as its contractor.

## Industry References

Please provide three references, including two current clients and one that is no longer serviced by your organization. For each reference, provide the company name, address, contact name, contact title, phone number and length of relationship with your company. If possible, attach one written reference letter.