



NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

FOR

Strategic Communications Plan

January 16, 2026

Northeast Florida Regional Council

40 E. Adams Street, Suite 320, Jacksonville, FL 32202

Tel: (904) 279-0880

<http://www.nefrc.org>

Point of Contact:

Donna Starling dstarling@nefrc.org

I. Introduction

A. Invitation

The NEFRC is looking for a qualified firm to provide communications and public relations services – focusing on an agencywide strategic communications plan. Preferences will be given to firms who have previously worked with or demonstrate a strong understanding of government media strategies and public sector communications.

B. List of Events

Action	Deadline (Eastern Time)
Request for proposal - released/published	Friday, January 16, 2026
RFP questions from vendors due to the NEFRC	Friday, January 23, 2026
NEFRC response to RFP questions published	Wednesday, January 28, 2026
Proposals due (Technical & Price)	Friday, February 20, 2026 @ noon
NEFRC Board of Directors approval of the award	Thursday, March 5, 2026
Notice of Award	Friday, March 6, 2026

RFP Questions and Response

To ensure consistent responses and provide correct information to all interested parties, questions regarding this Request for Proposals should be directed to Donna Starling no later than **Friday, January 23, 2026 by end of business day**.

Use subject line: **Strategic Communications Plan RFP**

The NEFRC will post the responses to the Vendor RFP questions to the NEFRC website <https://www.nefrc.org/> no later than **Wednesday, January 28, 2026, by end of business day**.

II. Project Description

A. Purpose

The NEFRC is looking for a qualified firm to provide communications and public relations services – focusing on an agencywide strategic communications plan.

B. Description of Entity

Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is one of ten regional planning councils in the state of Florida and was established in 1977. NEFRC supports Northeast Florida by championing the diverse strengths of the region by actively involving the people, businesses, governments, and organizations across our seven-county region: Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns.

The mission of Northeast Florida Regional Council is to serve our citizens and member governments by identifying and addressing regional issues through communication and collaboration to develop strategies that create a healthy, sustainable, thriving, and resilient region for future generations. Program areas include Emergency Preparedness, Community Development (planning and growth management, community engagement, and economic development) and Resiliency. The agency is funded by a combination of local government dues, federal and state contracts, and local fee for services contracts.

C. Scope of Work

The NEFRC works primarily with government entities – counties and municipalities, state, and federal agencies. This requires communication and engagement with local elected officials, state legislators, and related partner organizations. In the current climate, a greater level of visibility and brand awareness is critical to project success as well as to unlocking additional funding opportunities. Ideally, a strategic communications plan would identify how to tell the story of the NEFRC and set forward a clear value proposition.

NEFRC seeks a firm that has the following expertise:

- Experience in communications and marketing for public agencies
- Demonstrated success in creating an outreach strategy that connects with a variety of audiences, elected officials, non-profits, partner agencies, etc. through diverse platforms – social media, website, print, public outreach, and presentations.

The primary service requested is strategic communications that would include the following task:

- Task 1 - The development of a relevant and timely strategic communications plan aligned with the NEFRC's mission and priorities.
- Task 2 - Create messaging and narratives to promote the NEFRC's programs, projects, and impact.

D. Qualifications

1) Prior Experience

Firm must meet the following minimum qualifications, as of the submission deadline, to be considered responsive to this RFP:

- a) The firm shall have a minimum of three (3) years of experience satisfactorily providing the same or similar services requested in Section C. Scope of Work. Prior experience working with public entities is preferred.
- b) The firm shall be registered with the State of Florida and be in good standing.

2) Small and/or Minority-Owned Businesses

Efforts will be made by the NEFRC to utilize small businesses, minority, and women-owned businesses as established by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.3-8). A Minority or Woman-Owned Business is defined as that which is certified by the State of Florida.

III. Proposal Content

This section details the instructions and order to be followed in preparation for a response to this Request for Proposal (RFP). NEFRC reserves the right to reject any proposal as non-responsive if the proposal fails to include any of the required information in the specified order. Each part of the proposal should be clearly labeled for easy reference.

ALL PROPOSALS MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Section 1 -Organization Structure and Personnel (limit to 5 pages)

Briefly describe the firm's history, ownership, and organizational structure. Describe the services provided by the firm, type of clients and length of time in the industry. Provide an overview of the firm's service capabilities, including an organization chart and availability of personnel.

Section 2- Relevant Experience of Key Personnel and Firm (limit to 15 pages)

General Firm Information General firm information including the number of employees, location of firm headquarters, branch offices, and number of years in business may also be provided. Please note that general firm information is not a substitute for the specific information requested above.

Key Personnel Experience The submittal must identify the key personnel that are to be assigned if awarded a contract, detailing their qualifications, areas of expertise, a summary of their experience performing similar services, and a resume of each key personnel, including experience working with local governments, community groups, and decision-makers.

Firm Experience The submittal must describe the firm's pertinent project experience, including a list of performed relevant projects, past performance, individual or team accomplishments, description of software use (ex. Adobe Creative Suite, Canva, etc.) and examples of similar services performed for local governments, community groups, and decision-makers.

Work Samples Provide work samples for listed experiences related to subject area through additional materials and electronic links.

Section 3 - Method to Accomplish Work (limit 5 pages)

In this section of the proposal, applicants must provide a detailed description of their approach in the creation of a strategic communications plan appropriate for a regional government agency, which fully supports the mission of NEFRC.

This section shall include a work plan and schedule that will detail all tasks and actions that support project objectives and logically lead to a successful strategic communications plan.

Section 4 - References

The applicant must provide a minimum of three (3) client references by completing Attachment A. The firm's submission of an RFP application constitutes the firm's express consent for the NEFRC to contact the listed references to inquire regarding the qualifications of the firm.

Section 5 – Costs

Applicants should include a breakdown of the estimated costs by task to successfully complete a strategic communications plan, including a total cost.

Section 6 - Required Certifications

The firm must submit the following certifications:

Public Entity Crimes Certification

In accordance with Florida Statutes section 287.133(3) (a), the firm will complete and return the Public Entity Crimes Certification form.

Drug-Free Workplace Certification

In accordance with Florida Statutes section 287.087, the firm will complete and return the Drug-Free Workplace Certification form.

IV. Proposal Details

A. Closing Submission Date

Proposals must be submitted no later than noon on Friday, February 20, 2026.

B. Inquires

To ensure consistent responses and to ensure consistent and correct information to all interested parties, potential respondents must submit all questions and requests for clarification in writing to Donna Starling dstarling@nefrc.org. Use subject line: **Strategic communications plan RFP**. All questions and answers will be posted at www.nefrc.org. No questions will be accepted after **Friday, January 23, 2026.**

Except for as provided above and for current business, during the bidding process, all prospective proposers are hereby prohibited from contacting any member of the Northeast Florida Regional Council's Board of Directors or employees in any respect during the solicitation and evaluation period. The violation of this rule shall result in the automatic disqualification of any response to a bid solicitation submitted by the violator.

C. Conditions

All costs incurred in the preparation of a proposal responding to this RFP will be the responsibility of the firm and will not be reimbursed by the NEFRC.

D. Applicable Laws and Regulations

The selected firm shall comply with all federal, State, and local laws, rules, and regulations.

E. Right to Reject

The NEFRC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals received in response to this RFP. A contract for the accepted proposal will be based on the factors described in this RFP. The NEFRC may request additional information from any proposer.

NEFRC reserves the right to either (1) waive any minor irregularities or clerical errors, which are not material and do not prejudice other Applicants; or (2) to reject any, and all, Proposals submitted as non-responsive. Conditional Proposals or those which take exception to any provision of the RFP may be considered non-responsive and may be rejected.

F. Public Records

Information supplied by the Vendor to the NEFRC is subject to the Florida Public Records Law. Florida law provides that municipal records shall at all times be open for personal inspection by any person, Section 119.01, F.S., The Public Records Law. Information and materials received by the NEFRC in connection with all Vendor' response shall be deemed to be public records subject to public inspection upon award, recommendation for award, or 30 days after bid opening, whichever occurs first. Section 119.071, F.S.

G. Insurance Requirements

The firm awarded the contract shall secure, maintain, and present insurance coverage reflecting the minimum amounts of \$ 1,000,000 for general liability, \$1,000,000 for professional liability and workers compensation to include employers' liability limits as required by the State of Florida.

The firm must also name the NEFRC as an additional insured on general liability and professional liability.

V. Submission of Proposal

Firms shall submit a detailed technical proposal for the project, **as detailed in III. Proposal Content**. The proposal shall include sufficient information to enable the Northeast Florida Regional Council to fully evaluate the capabilities of the Vendor and the proposed approach to providing the specified services.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with these instructions. Failure to follow these instructions could be cause for rejection of the proposal.

Submittals must be easy to read in Times New Roman or Arial, no smaller than eleven and adhere to the page limits set forth herein. Proposals may be two-sided and each side of type size 8½" by 11" will equal one page.

Proposals may be submitted via email or hard copy.

To submit via email:

1. Send a **pdf document** of the proposal to Donna Starling dstarling@nefrc.org
2. Use the subject line: **Strategic communications plan RFP – Your Company Name**
3. Failure to use the correct subject line on the email may disqualify the Vendor.
4. Email should be sent no later than **Friday, February 20, 2026 @ noon**.

To submit via hard copy:

Quotes should be addressed to:

Northeast Florida Regional Council

40 E. Adams Street, Suite 320

Jacksonville, FL 32202

Attention: Donna Starling-Strategic communications plan RFP

1. Submit one (1) original hard copy of the proposal.
2. Submit one (1) PDF/electronic version on a flash drive.
3. Proposals must be **received** by the NEFRC no later than **Friday, February 20, 2026 @ noon**.

Late proposals will not be considered.

The NEFRC reserves the right to waive any immaterial inconsistencies in a proposal that might otherwise appear to make said proposal nonresponsive. Proposals may be judged nonresponsive and removed from further consideration if any of the following occur:

- The proposal is not received timely in accordance with the terms of this RFP.
- The proposal does not include all the required documentation.
- The proposal does not address the Scope of Work.

VI. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation of each proposal will be based on the following criteria:

Category	Criteria	Possible Score
Firm's Organizational Structure		10
	Company history and description	
	Company in good standing	
	Organizational and project team availability	
	Minority-owned Business	
Experience of Firm & Personnel		25
	Project lead experience in managing similar types of projects (strategic communications plan)	
	Key staff experience in similar types of projects	
	Experience with working directly for public agencies	
	Experience with working directly with Regional Planning Councils or similar regional agencies	
	Relevancy and quality of work samples provided	
Methodology to complete Strategic communications plan		30
	Creativity of project methodology	
	Comprehensive project tasks and timeline	
References		15
	Positive, relevant references received	
Cost		20
	Total costs	

VII. Review and Notification Process

The NEFRC may, at its discretion, request presentations by or meeting with any or all Vendors, to clarify or negotiate modifications of the Vendor's proposals.

However, the NEFRC reserves the right to make an award without further discussion of the proposals submitted. Therefore, proposals should be submitted initially on the most favorable terms, from both technical and price standpoints, which the Vendor can propose.

The NEFRC contemplates award of the contract to the responsible Vendor with the highest total points.

It is expected that the NEFRC will select a Vendor for these services by March 5, 2026. The successful Vendor will be notified via email within ten (10) business days of the selection.

In accordance with Florida Statutes section 120.57, Any person who is adversely affected by the agency's decision or intended decision shall file with the agency a notice of protest in writing within 72 hours after the posting of the notice of decision or intended decision. With respect to a protest of the terms, conditions, and specifications contained in a solicitation, including any provisions governing the methods for ranking bids, proposals, or replies, awarding contracts, reserving rights of further negotiation, or modifying or amending any contract, the notice of protest shall be filed in writing within 72 hours after the posting of the solicitation. The formal written protest shall be filed within 10 days after the date the notice of protest is filed. Failure to file a notice of protest or failure to file a formal written protest shall constitute a waiver of proceedings under this chapter. The formal written protest shall state with particularity the facts and law upon which the protest is based. Saturdays, Sundays, and state holidays shall be excluded in the computation of the 72-hour time periods provided by this paragraph. The NEFRC reserves the right to segment proposals or accept portions of proposals as is in the best interest of the program and the NEFRC. Final price negotiation will be the result of selection of all, or portion of the most successful proposal.

ATTACHMENT A – CONTRACTOR REFERENCES

CONTRACTOR: _____

PROVIDE THE INFORMATION REQUESTED BELOW ON ALL CONTRACT PROJECT WORK FOR THE PAST THREE (3) YEARS TO DATE. YOU MAY PHOTOCOPY ADDITIONAL PAGES.

It is imperative that accurate contact names and phone numbers be given for the projects listed. Client information should include a contact person who can comment on the contractor's ability to perform the services required under this contract. Ensure that telephone numbers and contact names given are up-to-date and accurate.

Project Number 1

1. Name of Client Organization _____
2. Name and Title of Point of Contact (POC) for Client Organization:

Phone Number of POC: _____ Email: _____

3. Approximate Value of Contract: _____
4. Duration of Contract: _____
5. Description of Services Provided:

6. Team Member(s) Involved: _____

Project Number 2

1. Name of Client Organization _____
2. Name and Title of Point of Contact (POC) for Client Organization:

Phone Number of POC: _____ Email: _____

3. Approximate Value of Contract: _____

4. Duration of Contract: _____
5. Description of Services Provided: _____

6. Team Member(s) Involved: _____

Project Number 3

1. Name of Client Organization _____
2. Name and Title of Point of Contact (POC) for Client Organization:

- Phone Number of POC: _____ Email: _____
3. Approximate Value of Contract: _____
4. Duration of Contract: _____
5. Description of Services Provided: _____

6. Team Member(s) Involved: _____

ATTACHMENT B - PUBLIC ENTITY CRIMES CERTIFICATION

SWORN STATEMENT UNDER SECTION 287.133 (3) (a), FLORIDA STATUTES, ON PUBLIC ENTITY CRIMES

THIS FORM MUST BE SIGNED IN THE PRESENCE OF A NOTARY PUBLIC OR OTHER OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO ADMINISTER OATHS.

1. This sworn statement is submitted for _____.
2. This sworn statement is submitted by _____
Whose business address is: _____
and (if applicable) its Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) is _____.
(If entity has no FEIN, include the Social Security Number of the individual signing this sworn statement: _____)
3. My name is _____ and my relationship to the entity named above is _____
4. I understand that a “public entity crime” as defined in Section 287.133(1)(g), Florida Statutes, means a violation of any state or federal law by a person with respect to and directly related to the transaction of business with any public entity or with an agency or political subdivision of any other state or of the United States, including, but not limited to, any bid or contract for goods or services to be provided to any public entity or an agency or political subdivision of any other state or of the United States and involving antitrust, fraud, theft, bribery, collusion, racketeering, conspiracy, or material misrepresentation.
5. I understand that “convicted” or “conviction” as defined in Section 287.133 (1) (b), Florida Statutes, means a finding of guilt or a conviction of a public entity crime, with or without adjudication of guilt, in any federal or state trial court of record, relating to charges brought by indictment or information after July 1, 1989, as a result of a jury verdict, non-jury trial, or entry of a plea of guilty or nolo contendere.
6. I understand that an “affiliate” as defined in Section 287.133(1) (a), Florida Statutes, means: (1) A predecessor or successor of a person convicted of a public entity crime; or (2) An entity under the control of any natural person who is active in the management of the entity and who has been convicted of a public entity crime. The term “affiliate” includes those officers, directors, executives, partners, shareholders, employees, members, and agents who are active in the management of an affiliate. The ownership by one person of shares constituting a controlling interest in another person, or a pooling of equipment or income among persons when not for fair market value under an arm’s length agreement, shall be a *prima facie* case that one person controls another person. A person who knowingly enters into a joint venture with a person who has been convicted of a public entity crime in Florida during the preceding 36 months shall be considered an affiliate.
7. I understand that a “person” as defined in Section 287.133(1) (e), Florida Statutes, means any natural person or entity organized under the laws of any state or of the United States with the legal power to enter into a binding contract and which bids or applies to bid on contracts for the

provision of goods or services let by a public entity, or which otherwise transacts or applies to transact business with a public entity. The term "person" includes those officers, directors, executives, partners, shareholders, employees, members, and agents who are active in management of an entity.

8. Based on information and belief, that statement which I have marked below is true in relation to the entity submitting this sworn statement. [Please indicate which statement applies.]

Neither the entity submitting this sworn statement, nor one or more of the officers, directors, executives, partners, shareholders, employees, members, or agents who are active in the management of the entity, nor any affiliate of the entity, has been charged with and convicted of public entity crime subsequent to July 1, 1989.

There has been a proceeding concerning the conviction before a hearing officer of the State of Florida, Division of Administrative Hearings. The final order entered by the hearing officer did not place the person or affiliate on the convicted vendor list. [Please attach a copy of the Final Order.]

The person or affiliate was placed on the convicted vendor list. There has been a subsequent proceeding before a hearing officer of the State of Florida, Division of Administrative Hearings. The final order entered by the hearing officer determined that it was in the public interest to remove the person or affiliate from the convicted vendor list. [Please attach a copy of the Final Order.]

The person or affiliate has not been placed on the convicted vendor list. [Please describe any action taken by or pending with the Department of General Services.]

Date: _____ Signature: _____

STATE OF: _____

COUNTY OF: _____

PERSONALLY APPEARED BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority,
who after first being sworn by me, affixed his/her signature in the space provided above on this
____ day of _____, in the year _____.

My commission expires: _____
Notary Public

Print, Type, or Stamp of Notary Public

Personally known to me, or Produced Identification:

Type of ID

ATTACHMENT C - DRUG FREE WORKPLACE CERTIFICATION

DRUG FREE WORKPLACE FORM

The undersigned vendor in accordance with Florida Statute 287.087 hereby certifies that

____ does:

(Name of Business)

1. Publish a statement notifying employees that the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance is prohibited in the workplace and specifying the actions that will be taken against employees for violations of such prohibition.
2. Inform employees about the dangers of drug abuse in the workplace, the business's policy of maintaining a drug-free workplace, any available drug counseling, rehabilitation, and employee assistance programs, and the penalties that may be imposed upon employees for drug abuse violations.
3. Give each employee engaged in providing the commodities or contractual services that are under bid a copy of the Drug-Free statement.
4. Notify the employees that as a condition of working on the commodities or contractual services that are under bid, the employee will abide by the terms of the statement and will notify the employer of any conviction of, or plea of guilty or nolo contendere to, any state, for a violation occurring in the workplace no later than five (5) days after such conviction.
5. Impose a sanction on, or require the satisfactory participation in a drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program if such is available in the employee's community, by any employee who is so convicted.
6. Make a good faith effort to continue to maintain a drug-free workplace through implementation of this section.

As the person authorized to sign the statement, I certify that this firm complies fully with the above requirements.

Authorized Signature

Print Name

Date