



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

**GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM SUPPORT**

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL NO.: 1223

ISSUED: NOVEMBER 23, 2023

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE: JANUARY, 8, 2024

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Invitation to Proponents

This Request for Proposal (“RFP”) is an invitation to prospective Proponents to submit proposals for the provision of consulting services to support strategic and operational government relations (GR) and advocacy, including to support political and strategic communications as it relates to influencing public policy. Colleges Ontario is seeking to establish a relationship with an agency-of-record for external support for provincial (Ontario) level GR, as well as key issue-specific support at the federal level when appropriate. The deliverables are further described in Part 2, The Deliverables (“the Deliverables”). This RFP is issued by Colleges Ontario.

Colleges Ontario will enter into a written one-year (12 month) retainer agreement with the selected Proponent for the provision of the Deliverables. The term thereafter of the agreement will convert to a monthly basis.

1.2 Definitions

Unless otherwise specified in this RFP, capitalized words and phrases have the following meaning:

“Colleges Ontario” or “CO” means the Association representing the twenty-four (24) public Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in Ontario.

“Conflict of Interest” has the same meaning as defined on page seven (7) of the RFP.

“Days” means calendar days and **“days”** has the same meaning.

“Colleges” or “colleges” means the twenty-four (24) Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario.

“Government Relations” or “government relations” or “GR” means the activities of engaging with political decision makers and representatives in order to influence or inform decisions, including and not only limited to acts classified as “lobbying” under provincial, federal, and municipal lobbying registries.

“Must,” “mandatory” or “required” means a requirement that must be met in order for the proposal to receive consideration.

“Proponent” means an individual or company that submits, or intends to submit, a proposal in response to this Request for Proposal.

1.3 Contact

Name: Cameron Clairmont
Title: Chief Administrative Officer
Email: clairmont@collegesontario.org

Colleges Ontario
130 Queens Quay East
West Tower, Suite 606
Toronto, Ontario M5A 0P6

PART 2 – THE DELIVERABLES

2.1 Project Title

Government Relations and Strategic Communications Program

2.2 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the consultancy support is to augment Colleges Ontario's internal government relations (GR) and strategic communications portfolio and to provide an evaluation of internal and external perceptions of CO's advocacy, as well as an inventory of the organization's strategic communications capabilities.

CO is seeking proposals for an overall one-year retainer Agreement for GR support, as well as a phased/project-based approach of specific deliverables in addition to base retainer Agreement.

As part of retainer-based work, the successful proponent is required to work with Colleges Ontario and the Government Relations and Executive teams, as well as the Board of Directors of Colleges Ontario. Routine GR and strategic communications work will include:

- a. Government monitoring (Provincial - Queen's Park and Federal - Parliament Hill).
- b. Engagement with key government departments.
- c. Participation in relevant events.
- d. Presentations to the Board of Directors on key issues and government landscape.
- e. Strategic direction.
- f. Meetings with government officials.
- g. Monthly activity reports.
- h. Other work as directed.

In addition to the base retainer, Colleges Ontario is seeking the successful proponent to conduct projects, that include, but not limited to:

1. Initiation phase with activities such as:
 - a. Conducting internal and external perception audit(s).
 - b. Reviewing of key issues and positions.
 - c. Analyzing and inventorying gaps in existing strategic communication and advocacy tools as they relate to GR and stakeholder relations.
2. secondary phase(s) with activities such as:
 - a. Developing detailed GR/advocacy roadmap(s).
 - b. Enhancing GR key strategic priorities.
 - c. Reinforcing board-level GR awareness and expertise.
 - d. Defining and executing on-going, issue-specific GR campaigns.
 - e. Present at COP retreat.

2.3 Background

Colleges Ontario's current GR landscape is a positive one, in which the association holds exceptional relationships with key government departments and is a credible and reliable stakeholder, particularly at the provincial level.

Colleges Ontario has a successful track-record of maintaining positive and proactive relationships with successive governments, some of which implement policy initiatives that support the colleges system more than others. The most vital issues cross federal and provincial jurisdictions, e.g., housing, international students, applied research, etc., of which many are beyond the control of Colleges Ontario and yet governments are responding to pressures, and our members are implicated in these high-profile issues.

In recent years, CO has seen exceptional government cooperation and support in introducing regulatory change to enable colleges to implement three-year degrees and expand the number of four-year degrees available. CO has also achieved agreement for college stand-alone nursing degrees and coordinated the implementation of accelerated Personal Support Worker programs to address critical skills shortages in the Ontario labour market.

Concurrently, colleges across Ontario are faced with challenges associated with an on-going tuition freeze (following a 10% cut four years ago) and limited/frozen provincial funding for programs, operations, and maintenance. There is generally no public investment in college capital. Without financial stability and material capital investments, colleges have been entrepreneurial in establishing sources of revenue, particularly growing the number of international students that many colleges accept. The expanding reliance on international students serves both as a revenue generator and as a critical pipeline for the labour market. The increase in international students on college campuses, as well as partnerships with private career colleges to offer public college credentials has expanded the risk that the association and individual colleges face when engaging with provincial and federal levels of government. All government relations and strategic communication efforts must take this landscape into consideration.

2.4 Reporting Relationship

The Director of Government and Community Relations and President and CEO of Colleges Ontario will oversee the consulting relationship and provide overall direction.

2.5 Description of Deliverables

The selected Proponent will:

- i) Develop a framework for approach to and outline deliverables for base retainer.

- ii) Develop an initial work plan to present to Colleges Ontario on the phased approach with integrated on-going GR and Strategic Communications support.
 - iii) Develop survey and interview questions to be approved by Colleges Ontario for a perception audit as part of year one, Phase one.
 - iv) Provide a summary of the materials and resources required to conduct the evaluation of strategic communications capabilities.
 - v) Highlight areas where further information is needed.
- vi) Reporting process:
- i) Provide updates to Colleges Ontario every two weeks and in monthly activity reports.
 - ii) Produce a preliminary report by a timeline set out in the proposal.
 - iii) Produce a draft, final report outlining the outcome of a GR perception review and inventory of strategic communications capabilities.
 - iv) Present findings and draft of the report to Colleges Ontario by a date set out in the proposal.
 - v) Incorporate any changes from Colleges Ontario and provide a final report by the date set out in the proposal, no later than 01 June 2024.

NOTE: Where possible, all meetings will take place virtually. The selected Proponent will be responsible for any meeting, and other expenses for the project as well as for the preparation of the report.

PART 3 –PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS, GUIDELINES AND EVALUATION

3.1 Mandatory Requirements

a) Proponent Information

A summary sheet containing the following information is required:

- i) Proponent’s registered legal business name and any other name under which it operates, and the full address and telephone number.
- ii) Name of the person who is primarily responsible for the Proposal.
- iii) Name of the person(s) who will be responsible for management of the proposed deliverables.
- iv) The type of business structure of the Proponent, such as an individual, sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership, joint venture, incorporated consortium, or other legally recognized entity.
- v) Names and full details of any other parties whose services the Proponent intends to subcontract or use in connection with the management of the deliverables for this RFP.
- vii) A statement confirming whether or not the Proponent is associated with another individual, sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership, joint venture, entity or

consortium that has as its business the provision of deliverables similar to those described in this RFP.

- viii) To significantly reduce reliability on email as a common modality of document delivery and collaboration, outline how the proponent will address and handle document delivery, document review and collaboration, and secure storage.

b) Experience

Proponents should include demonstrated expertise and experience in the following:

- i) Strategic, executive GR support to inform CEO, Leadership team and Board activities and perspectives.
- ii) Operational GR skillsets to monitor and conduct intelligence gathering.
- iii) Expert knowledge in strategic communications and the use of effective tools to inform advocacy.
- iv) Registration in appropriate lobbying registries.
- v) Capability to conduct lobbying and strategic counsel at the provincial (Ontario) and federal levels with strong relationships at both levels.
- vi) Leading retainer-based consulting model with project phases.

c) Conflict of Interest

The Proponent must make a full and complete disclosure of any existing business or other relationships that would give rise to a Conflict of Interest in the performance of the study as described in this RFP. The Proponent, by submitting the proposal, confirms that, to its best knowledge and belief, no actual or potential Conflict of Interest exists with respect to the submission of the proposal or performance of the study, except where disclosed in the Proposal Submission Form. Where Colleges Ontario discovers a Proponent's failure to disclose all actual or potential Conflicts of Interest, Colleges Ontario may disqualify the Proponent or terminate immediately any contract awarded to that proponent.

If, at the sole and absolute discretion of Colleges Ontario, the Proponent is found to be in a Conflict of Interest, Colleges Ontario may disqualify the proposal submitted by the Proponent.

c) Right to Rescind

Colleges Ontario has the right to rescind any Contract awarded to a Proponent in the event that Colleges Ontario, in its sole discretion, determines that the Proponent made a misrepresentation or submitted any inaccurate or incomplete information.

d) References

Proponents are required to provide two references from organizations for which the Proponent has successfully provided similar services and goods in the past three years. The name and telephone number of a contact person for each reference and a brief outline of the nature of the goods and services provided must also be included. Colleges

Ontario, in its sole discretion, may check the Proponent's references to confirm the Proponent's experience and/or ability to provide the Deliverables required and described in its proposal.

e) Statement of Costs

The Proponent must provide a detailed Statement of Costs associated with the project. The Statement of Costs must include the per diem rates for each assigned individual and estimated number of days per individual, as well as total fixed price costs for each component, and an overall fixed price cost. Proponents must identify separately any out-of-pocket costs for additional items. Only incurred travel costs agreed to by Colleges Ontario will be reimbursed according to Colleges Ontario's travel reimbursement policy. Taxes must be itemized separately. The Proponent shall not use Funds for any HST costs for which it has or will receive a rebate, tax credit, input tax credit or refund. All costs must be in Canadian dollars.

3.2 Guidelines for Rated Criteria

The objective of the evaluation process is to identify experienced Proponents, with preference given to an Ontario based entity, capable of providing the deliverables within a reasonable timeframe. Therefore, in addition to the mandatory requirements, Proponents should include the following details:

a) Experience and Qualifications

- i) A description of the goods and services the Proponent has previously and/or is currently delivering, with an emphasis on experience relevant to the Deliverables.
- ii) The roles and responsibilities of the Proponents and any of its agents, employees, and sub-contractors who will be involved in providing the Deliverables, together with their names, respective professional resumes, and any additional information on their knowledge, skills, and experience in postsecondary education.
- iii) Relevant experience with projects of a similar type and scope.

b) Proposed Approach and Methodology

Each Proponent should:

- i) Outline the proposed approach and methodology to conduct the work.
- ii) Describe how the deliverables will be provided and provide a work plan and timeline.
- iii) The work plan should include an organizational chart and an indication of how the Proponent intends to structure its working relationship with Colleges Ontario. The Proponent should include information on task assignments for each individual in the project team if applicable, rationale for each assignment according to level of expertise of each team member.

Note: Colleges Ontario is open to alternative approaches and/or methodologies should they, in the view of the consultant, better accomplish the project goals.

3.3 Evaluation of Proposals

Colleges Ontario will evaluate the overall quality of the proposals with attention to the following:

a) Experience and Qualifications

- i) Experience planning, implementing & managing similar types of projects.
- ii) Education qualifications & experience of individual team members.
- iii) Knowledge and experience analysing and authoring reports of similar scope and complexity.
- iv) Experience in postsecondary education.

b) Proposed Approach and Methodology

- i) Demonstrated understanding of project and deliverables.
- ii) Inclusion of value-add elements of the evaluation.
- iii) Work plan, including timelines and resources assigned.
- iv) Team organization & reporting structure

c) Statement of costs

- i) Includes total project cost and a detailed breakdown.

Note: Mandatory Requirements must be met before a proposal is evaluated. If, in the opinion of Colleges Ontario, a Proposal does not meet the Mandatory Requirements, it will be disqualified.

PART 4 – TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE RFP PROCESS

4.1 Timetable

The following is the schedule for this RFP:

Issue Date of RFP **November 23, 2023**

Pre-Submission Information Session (Week of TBD) **December 04, 2023**

Proponent's Deadline for Questions 5:00 pm **December 04, 2023**

Proposal Submission Deadline 5:00 pm **January 8, 2024**

Period for which proposals are irrevocable after Proposal Submission Deadline is 90 days.

At any time prior to the Proposal Submission Deadline, the RFP timetable is tentative only.

4.2 General Instructions and Information

- i) Any quantities or data provided in the RFP or in response to questions is an estimate for the purpose of indicating the general size of the work, and Colleges Ontario does not guarantee its accuracy.
- ii) It is the Proponent's responsibility to avail itself of all the necessary information to prepare a proposal in response to this RFP.
- iii) Proponents are responsible for bearing all costs incurred in the preparation and presentation of its proposal including costs incurred for interviews or demonstrations.
- iv) Questions concerning the RFP must be made in writing or by e-mail to the Colleges Ontario Contact on or before the **December 04, 2023**. No communications concerning this RFP are to be directed to anyone other than the Contact. Colleges Ontario is under no obligation to provide additional information but may do so at its sole discretion.
- v) It is the responsibility of the Proponent to seek clarification from the Contact on any matter it considers to be unclear. Colleges Ontario will not be responsible for any misunderstanding on the part of the Proponent concerning the RFP or its process.
- vi) If Colleges Ontario, for any reason, determines that it is necessary to provide additional information relating to this RFP, such information will be communicated to all proponents by addenda circulated to each Proponent. Each addendum will form an integral part of this RFP. Proponents are responsible for obtaining all addenda issued by Colleges Ontario.
- vii) In the event that a Proponent chooses to cancel the receipt of addenda or amendments, its proposal may be rejected.
- viii) If any addendum is issued after the deadline, Colleges Ontario may at its discretion extend the Proposal Submission Deadline for a reasonable amount of time.

4.3 Submission of Proposals

a) Instructions for Submission

Proposals must be submitted by the following method:

- i) A Proponent must submit one (1) PDF copy of its proposal and a fully completed Proposal Submission Form (Appendix B) marked as CONFIDENTIAL. The RFP title must be clearly marked on the first page of the submission and on the email subject line.
- ii) Submit proposals in PDF document format **via email** to clairmont@collegesontario.org **by 5:00 p.m., Monday, January 8, 2024**.
- iii) Proposals submitted in any other manner or after the Proposal Submission Deadline cannot be accepted.

- iv) At any time before the Proposal Submission Deadline, a Proponent may amend or withdraw a submitted proposal. Any amendment should clearly indicate what part of the proposal the amendment is intending to replace. Any amendment or notice of withdrawal must be submitted in the same manner as set out in the above submission procedures.
- v) Proposals shall remain irrevocable in the form submitted by the Proponent for a period of ninety (90) days running from the date of the Proposal Submission Deadline.
- vi) Colleges Ontario reserves the right to seek clarification and supplementary information relating to the clarification from proponents after the Proposal Submission Deadline. Colleges Ontario also reserves the right to interview any or all Proponents to obtain information about or clarification of their proposals. In the event that Colleges Ontario receives new information from the Proponent that results in earlier information being deemed to be inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading, Colleges Ontario reserves the right to revisit the Proponent's compliance with the Mandatory Requirements and/or adjust the evaluation of Rated Criteria.
- vii) All the provisions of this RFP are deemed to be accepted by each Proponent and incorporated into each Proponent's proposal.
- viii) Colleges Ontario will not consider any web site content or any other external documents as a part of a Proponent's proposal.
- ix) Except where expressly set out to the contrary in this RFP or in the Proponent's proposal, the proposal and any accompanying documentation submitted by a proponent shall become the property of Colleges Ontario and shall not be returned.

4.4 Selection of Proponent

Colleges Ontario anticipates that it will select a Proponent by January 19, 2024. Notice of selection by Colleges Ontario to the selected Proponent will be in writing. The selected Proponent and Colleges Ontario will enter into a written agreement within ten (10) days of notice of selection. This provision may be waived by Colleges Ontario at its sole discretion.

If Colleges Ontario and the selected Proponent fail to enter into an Agreement or satisfy any other applicable conditions within ten (10) days of notice of selection, Colleges Ontario may, in its sole and absolute discretion and without incurring any liability, rescind the selection of that Proponent and proceed with the selection of another Proponent.

Once the successful Proponent and Colleges Ontario enter into an Agreement, the other Proponents will be notified by Colleges Ontario of the outcome of the procurement process.

Proponents are advised that their proposals will, as necessary, be disclosed on a confidential basis, to Colleges Ontario's advisers retained for the purpose of evaluating or participating in the evaluation of this proposal.

Colleges Ontario reserves the right to:

- a) Make public the names of any or all Proponents.
- b) Request clarification or the submission of supplemental information in relation to the clarification request from any Proponent and incorporate a Proponent's response to that request into the Proponent's proposal.
- c) Adjust or reject a Proponent's proposal on the basis of:
 - i) a financial analysis determining the actual cost of the proposal when considering factors including quality, service, and price;
 - ii) information provided by references;
 - iii) the information provided by a Proponent resulting from Colleges Ontario exercising its clarification rights under this RFP process; or
 - iv) other relevant information that arises during this RFP process;
- d) Waive formalities and accept proposals which substantially comply with the requirements of this RFP.
- e) Verify with any proponent or with a third party any information set out in a proposal.
- f) Disqualify any Proponent whose proposal contains misrepresentations or any other inaccurate or misleading information.
- g) Disqualify any Proponent or the proposal of any Proponent who has engaged in conduct prohibited by this RFP.
- h) Make changes, including substantial changes, to this RFP provided that those changes are issued by way of addenda in the manner set out in this RFP.
- i) Select any Proponent other than the Proponent whose proposal reflects the lowest cost to Colleges Ontario or the highest overall score.
- j) Cancel this RFP process at any stage.
- k) Cancel this RFP process at any stage and issue a new RFP for the same or similar deliverables.
- l) Accept any proposal in whole or in part.

- m) Discuss with any Proponent different or additional terms to those contemplated in this RFP or in any Proponent's proposal.
- n) If a single proposal is received, reject the proposal of the sole Proponent, and cancel this RFP process or enter into direct negotiations with the sole Proponent.
- o) Reject any or all proposals in its absolute discretion.

These reserved rights are in addition to any other express rights or any other rights which may be implied in the circumstances and Colleges Ontario shall not be liable for any expenses, costs, losses or any direct or indirect damages incurred or suffered by any Proponent or any third party resulting from Colleges Ontario exercising any of its express or implied rights under this RFP. By submitting this proposal, the respondent consents to collection of the information as contemplated under this RFP for the uses contemplated under this RFP.

APPENDIX – PROPOSAL SUBMISSION FORM APPENDIX B

Proponent's Full Business Name and Address:

Proponent's E-mail and phone number:

Contact name, email, and phone number of person primarily responsible for the Proposal:

Declaration of Proponent:

By submitting the proposal, I/we agree and consent to the terms, conditions, and provisions of the RFP.

I/We have included references as required by Colleges Ontario and consent to Colleges Ontario performing checks with those references and with any other relevant references.

I/We understand that my/our submitted proposal is based upon the acceptance of the proposal, in whole or in part, within 90 days of the Proposal Submission Deadline and is irrevocable during that period.

Conflict of Interest

I/ We hereby confirm that there is not, nor was there ever, any actual or potential Conflict of Interest relating to the preparation of my/our submission, nor do I/we foresee any actual or potential Conflict of Interest in performing the contractual obligations contemplated in the RFP.

[or if applicable, strike out the above and include the following:]

The following is a list of actual or potential Conflicts of Interest relating to the preparation of our submission or the performance of the contractual obligations contemplated in the RFP:

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION FORM (CONTINUED)

In submitting the proposal, I/we have no [strike out the inapplicable portion] knowledge of or ability to avail ourselves of confidential information (other than confidential information that may have been disclosed by Colleges Ontario to the proponents in the normal course of the RFP) which is relevant to the contemplated contract, its pricing, or the RFP evaluation process.

Disclosure of Information to Evaluation Team

I/We hereby consent to the disclosure, on a confidential basis, of this proposal by Colleges Ontario to the project evaluation team for the purpose of evaluating or participating in the evaluation of this proposal.

Signature of proponent representative:

Name and Title:

I have authority to bind the proponent.

Dated at this day of , 202