

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MARKETING SERVICES VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY

ISSUED BY

Vermont State University

RFP TIMELINE APPLICATION DEADLINE

- RFP issued – Tuesday, May 13th, 2025
- Deadline for questions - Friday, May 30th, 2025 5:00 PM EST
- Responses due Friday – June 13th, 2025 5:00 PM EST
- Finalist presentations – Week of June 23rd 2025
- Vendor selection – June 30th, 2025
- Project start – ASAP – July 2025

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Email PDF versions of all documents to hannah.reid@vermontstate.edu by the deadline above, using the following naming convention:

- **Email Subject Line:** VTSU STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MARKETING SERVICES RFP
- **Proposal:** Applicant_Name RFP VTSU STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MARKETING SERVICES PROPOSAL.PDF
- **Redacted Proposal:** Applicant_Name RFP VTSU STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MARKETING SERVICES REDACTED PROPOSAL.PDF

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RFP

Questions regarding this RFP may be directed to Hannah Reid hannah.reid@vermontstate.edu. For fastest response, please enter VTSU STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MARKETING SERVICES **RFP Question** in the subject line of your message.

Contents

VERMONT STATE COLLEGES SYSTEM OVERVIEW	3
GOALS & SUMMARY OF SERVICES REQUESTED	3
SERVICES REQUESTED	3
CONTRACT TIMELINE	6
QUALIFICATIONS	6
PROPOSAL STRUCTURE & FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS.....	7
EVALUATION.....	8
GENERAL CONDITIONS	9
CONFIDENTIALITY.....	9

VERMONT STATE COLLEGES SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The [Vermont State Colleges System](#) (VSCS) is comprised of Vermont State University (VTSU) and [Community College of Vermont](#) (CCV). In July 2023, under the guidance of Vermont's Governor, Legislature, the Board of Trustees, and the State's *Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education in Vermont*, the VSCS successfully merged three of its small state institutions [Northern Vermont University](#) (NVU)¹, [Vermont Technical College](#) (VTC), and [Castleton University](#) (CU) to form one, unified public university dedicated to making rich, real-world learning opportunities accessible to all Vermont students, while simultaneously meeting the needs of communities, workforce, and economy.

GOALS & SUMMARY OF SERVICES REQUESTED

Vermont State University (VTSU) invites proposals from partners with expertise in higher education brand and enrollment marketing for services to support VTSU in developing and implementing the digital marketing and enrollment strategies, systems, tools, and content to deliver the right messages and CTAs to the right audiences through the right channels at the right time to achieve the following key goals:

1. Increase brand recognition and awareness across priority audiences
2. Increase enrollment prospective student audiences
3. Increase retention & credit seeking behavior among current students
4. Recapture market share within competitive landscape

SERVICES REQUESTED

1. **Marketing Strategy Development:** Work collaboratively with VTSU's marketing and admissions teams to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated marketing strategy designed to help Vermont State University achieve long-and short-term brand and enrollment goals. This strategy should include but not be limited to: 1) Paid & Performance Marketing, 2) Organic & Content Marketing, and 3) Out-of-home & Traditional Marketing.
2. **Marketing Strategy Implementation:** Work Collaboratively with VTSU's Marketing and Admissions team to implement marketing strategy across a variety of channels and tactics, including, but not limited to:
 - o **Paid & Performance Marketing**
 - Paid Search (SEM) - Capture high-intent prospects with targeted ads

¹ Northern Vermont University was created on July 1, 2018 from the merger of Lyndon State College and Johnson State College. The unification effort was approved on [September 29, 2016](#) by the board and fully completed by June 30, 2018. [Unification documentation](#) can be found on the VSC website.

- Paid Social Media Advertising- Drive engagement through paid, targeted social media advertising
 - Digital Display Advertising - Increase brand awareness with banner ads
 - Geotargeting - Deliver location-based ads for precise reach across a variety of digital channels
 - Retargeting - Remarket to prospects who have expressed interest
 - Niche Advertising - Niche publications to expand audiences beyond typical paid search and social (Reddit, podcasts, college prep websites for parent audiences, etc.)
 - **Organic & Content Marketing**
 - SEO - Boost the visibility of and organic traffic to VTSU website
 - Organic Social Media – Develop and a strategic plan to build community, and increase brand visibility and engagement through non-paid social media strategies
 - Content Marketing - Create SEO-driven blogs, articles, and multimedia content for VTSU website
 - Email Marketing & Automation – Collaborate with Enrollment Communications team to nurture leads with targeted, personalized campaigns
 - **Out-of-home & Traditional Marketing**
 - Audio & Streaming Ads – Reach new audiences via radio, podcasts, and music streaming platform advertisements
 - Billboards & Transit Ads – Boost brand awareness with placements on buses, trains, high schools, and key commuter routes
 - Print & Direct Mail – Industry publications and personalized outreach to drive action
 - Connected TV & Cinema Ads – Target prospects with video ads on streaming platforms and in theaters
 - Campus & Event Marketing – Engage students where they are through campus sponsorships, digital signage and industry events
 - Geofencing & Mobile Targeting – Deliver location-based ads to prospective students in key markets
3. **Design & Content Generation:** Provide creative design and content generation support as needed, including but not limited to:
- Message Mapping & Development
 - Content Marketing (Blog Posts, Thought Leadership, Long-Form Content)
 - Graphic Design & Video Content Production
 - Student Journey Mapping
4. **Analytics & Optimization:** Tracking, analyzing, reporting, and optimizing marketing strategy performance across all channels and campaigns, including but not limited to:

- Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) - Improve website performance and lead generation
 - A/B Testing & Personalization - Optimize messaging and user experience
 - Analytics & Reporting - Measure performance and refine strategies
 - Marketing Automation - Streamline workflows for efficiency
 - Platform Integrations - Connect marketing efforts with CRM and enrollment tools
5. **Prospect & Retention Marketing & Communications:** Utilize a range of messaging and channels (Slate, SMS, Live Chat, Outbound Calls, Email, etc.) to support prospective students from inquiry to first class through services including by not limited to:
- Inquiry and lead generation - Identify and prioritize prospective students with high intent to apply or register.
 - Creation of high impact content (i.e. video shorts) to progress students through stages and encourage two-way communication
 - Support campaign development and implementation (i.e. search)
 - Influencer (i.e. parent) engagement across pipeline
 - Financial Aid Support - Guide prospective students through the Financial Aid application process
6. **Retention Support:** Improve student retention by providing customized supports, including but not limited to:
- Reentry, Stop-Out Campaigns - Re-engage and re-enroll students who have stopped out, providing a smooth return path.
 - Supplemental Document Support - Streamline the supplemental documents and transcript process to remove administrative friction for students during application or re-entry.
7. **Website Evaluation and Strategic Development Recommendations:** Review and provide development recommendations to ensure VTSU's website is aligned with and optimized for marketing strategy.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current VTSU website structure, design, and content to:
 - Assess website alignment with VTSU's overall marketing strategy and institutional goals.
 - Evaluate user experience (UX), navigation, and accessibility for diverse audiences.
 - Analyze website performance metrics including SEO, load times, and mobile responsiveness.
 - Identify gaps or inconsistencies in branding, messaging, and visual identity.
 - Recommend strategies to enhance content relevance, engagement, and conversion.

- Propose new features or tools to support recruitment, retention, and community engagement.
 - Propose new features to support integration with social media, CRM systems, and other marketing channels
8. **Market Research:** Conduct basic market research and trend tracking as needed to ensure VTSU's marketing strategy (channels, tactics, messaging, creative) is both unique and competitive within the higher education landscape.
 9. **Project Management:** Provide project management support as needed.

CONTRACT TIMELINE

- Contract will start July 15, 2025 and conclude June 30, 2026 with the option to extend for up to 5 years.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Firms must have a minimum of five (5) years demonstrated experience and expertise in successful higher education marketing strategy development and implementation.
- Bidders must be familiar with Slate (admissions CRM). Preference will be given to Slate Preferred Partners.
- Bidders must be licensed in their state(s) of operation and comply with all federal, state and local laws, including the Equal Opportunity Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, civil rights legislation and OSHA regulations.
- Bidders must disclose any relevant conflicts of interest and/or pending lawsuits, as well as the name of any officer, director or agent who is also an employee of any institution in the Vermont State Colleges System.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- All submissions are due no later than **Friday, June 13th, 2025 by 5:00 PM EST.**
- Proposals will be reviewed by an evaluation committee consisting of Vermont State Colleges System staff and consultants. This committee will be the sole judge of the contract that best meets the university's needs, interests and budget. The contract will be awarded to the chosen partner no later than **Monday, June 30th, 2025 by 5:00 PM EST.**

- The committee reserves the right to reject all proposals, to waive any informalities and technicalities, to solicit and re-advertise for new proposals, or to abandon the project in its entirety.
- Please limit proposals to no more than 40 pages.
- **Redacted Copy:** Provide a second copy of the proposal, redacting any portion of the proposal that is reasonably believed to be exempt from disclosure under the Vermont Public Records Act to protect your trade secrets.

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE & FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

Please format proposals to standard 8.5” x 11 paper side and adhere to the following format:

SECTION 1: Company Information

- Name, address, phone, email fax and website URL Federal ID number
- Contact person for the purpose of your proposal
- Date of incorporation/how long in business
- State where licensed Number of employees

SECTION 2: Company Narrative

- Provide a 1- to 4-page narrative describing your experience, your philosophy/approach, and how that philosophy/approach relates to the project outlined in this RFP.

SECTION 3: Personnel

- Provide a list of key personnel who will work on this project along with an overview of their professional background/experience and the role they would play in this project.

SECTION 4: Scope of Work, Timeline & Pricing

- Describe the scope of work as you see it and how you will approach the project.
 - Describe how you will use AI to improve the quality of work and efficiency of services delivered.
- Please provide a line-item budget with individual estimates for each of the (9) marketing services areas requested and any additional parameters affecting the cost of this project, including travel, optional services and contingencies. The contract may be awarded on the full or partial scope of this proposal.
 - Please exclude the cost of purchased media from the budget.

- Budget reference: In FY2025 VTSU's total marketing services and media budget was \$800,000. VTSU expects a moderate (10%-35%) increase in the FY2026 marketing budget. Proposals should align with a similar budget range.

SECTION 5: References & Work Samples

- Provide references from three to five clients or employers performing work of similar complexity. In each reference include the following:
 - Project name and description including primary project scope, description of complexity, communication, and project plan
 - Outcome of project including achievement of goals and ROI if available
 - Name of company
 - Project sponsor name, telephone number, and email address.

EVALUATION

- Proposals will be reviewed by an evaluation committee consisting of Vermont State Colleges System staff. This committee will be the sole judge of the contract that best meets the colleges' needs, interests and budget.
- The committee reserves the right to reject all proposals, waive any informalities and technicalities, solicit and re-advertise for new proposals, or abandon the project in its entirety.
- Responses will be evaluated on experience, references, staffing capacity, services to be provided, and costs.
- It is anticipated that the initial term of any agreement resulting from this RFP will be for no more than one fiscal year. There shall be no separate or additional charges, fees, handling or other incidental costs following contract award.
- At the end of the contract, the Vermont State College system will maintain the rights to all project assets, including artwork and verbiage.
- Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria using a "cost per quality point" rubric. Each bidder's proposed cost will be divided by the number of points earned in our evaluation, and the bidder with the lowest cost per quality point may be awarded the contract.
 - General quality, adequacy, and clarity of response.
 - Demonstrated ability to successfully complete the requirements identified in each phase of work identified in the scope.
 - Qualifications and experience of the bidding company and the staff who will work on this project.
 - Quality and applicability of sample campaigns.
 - Cost of services.
 - Project completion schedule and strategy.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

1. This RFP does not commit the Vermont State Colleges System to award a contract.
2. This RFP and the process it describes are proprietary to the VSCS and are for the sole and exclusive benefit of the corporation. No other party, including any Applicant, is granted any rights hereunder. Any response, including written documents and verbal communication, by any Applicant to this RFP, shall become the property of the VSCS and may be subject to public disclosure as described in the Confidentiality section, below
3. Submission of a proposal indicates acceptance by the Consultant of the conditions contained in this RFP, unless clearly and specifically noted in the proposal submitted and confirmed in the contract between Vermont State Colleges System and the chosen Consultant selected
4. Responses shall be binding upon the chosen Consultant and irrevocable for up to 60 days following the close of applications
5. From the release date of this request for proposal until award of the contract, no contact with Vermont State Colleges System personnel or board members related to this solicitation is permitted. Direct all communications to the designated contact on the first page of this request.
6. The Vermont State Colleges System reserves the right to:
 - a. Request clarification and additional information from any Consultant during the evaluation process
 - b. Negotiate with the chosen Consultant to include further services not identified in this RFP
 - c. Re-advertise with either an identical or a revised scope of work or cancel requirements in their entirety
 - d. Issue subsequent RFPs based on refinement of concepts proposed in response to this request
 - e. Conduct investigations of the qualifications of the Applicant as deemed appropriate
 - f. Request the Applicant modify the submitted proposal to more fully meet the needs of the Vermont State Colleges System

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Vermont State Colleges System complies with the Vermont Public Records Act, 1 VSA § 315 *et seq.* which requires public agencies to allow any person to inspect or copy any public record upon request. Accordingly, applicants for this RFP are hereby advised that any communications, data or other information received by the Vermont State Colleges System during the RFP process could be subject to a public records request. However, certain public records are exempt from public inspection and copying, as set forth in 1 VSA § 317(c),

including, for example, those portions of a record which meet the statutory definition of a trade secret. Accordingly, Applicant should submit a second copy of their proposal, from which any portion of the proposal that the Applicant reasonably believes to be exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Act has been redacted. By submitting a proposal, you indicate that you understand the requirements of this section and the potential applicability of Vermont's Public Records Act to your proposal. If you do not submit a redacted record, you understand that Vermont State Colleges System may provide a copy of your proposal in response to a public records request, without notice to you.