

**Concordia College
Moorhead, Minn.
ConcordiaCollege.edu**

**Request for Marketing Proposals
Jan. 10, 2014**

Introduction

Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn., invites you to submit a proposal(s) for contract services related to two interrelated marketing initiatives. These projects are viewed as long-term initiatives commencing in May 2014. You are one of only 10 agencies receiving this initial RFP, based on a pre-screening process identifying you as a highly capable and potentially strong fit for Concordia. You may choose to submit a proposal for one or both of the following projects:

1. Competitive awareness and image research
2. Enrollment marketing communications plan and creative support

This RFP includes information regarding the scope, purpose and goals of these initiatives. The intent is to build upon the college's newly refined brand positioning strategy, which reflects intelligence gained in recently completed market research and discoveries associated with the launch of a new institutional website in August 2013.

Projects Context

As a private, liberal arts college of the Evangelical Church in America, Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn., is certainly not immune from intensifying challenges related to competition, demographics and economics. The college enjoys a strong regional reputation but is increasingly challenged to distinguish itself among a remarkably diffuse set of private and public competitors.

Since 2005, Concordia College has done extensive work to develop its brand positioning strategy, engaging the services of national higher education marketing and research firms to help guide that process. The college's positioning strategy was most recently updated in 2011 and further shaped by the 2012-13 Pricing and Positioning study conducted by The Art & Science Group and the 2013 renovated college website, launched in partnership with Fastspot. Ultimately, the sum of this intelligence continues to inform the evolution and execution of the College's 2012-17 Plan.

Given these efforts to date, our marketing partner(s) for this project will not be working from ground zero as it relates to the "institutional discovery" stage. While we understand the need for any new marketing partner to get its own sense of whom we are, your proposal should reflect an acknowledgement that much relevant ground work has already been done for these projects.

At the same time, of course, we recognize that the research work contained in “Project 2” described below will ultimately play a significant role in refining our brand positioning strategy and our marketing communication plan and tactical execution.

In the most ideal world, completion of the new research project would precede a new enrollment marketing communications strategy and accompanying creative execution. However, there is a pressing and practical need to expedite an enhanced, *transitional* enrollment marketing communications plan for implementation in August 2014 through April 2015 that could be carried out during/prior to the execution and results of the new research. New research findings would be used to refine or reshape year two (May 2015-April 2016) of the enrollment marketing communications plan as deemed prudent.

This RFP exercise will be used to discern the best model(s) for ensuring synergy and collaborative comfort between any newly selected marketing partner(s) and our internal marketing staff. Concordia’s marketing communication team includes 17 members comprised of an office manager, three designers, a publications director, a copy editor, two printers, an online content editor, videographer/social media specialist, online developer, online communications director, media relations director, photographer/writer, sports information director, project coordinator and senior director. The enrollment division also has a director of enrollment marketing.

Your questions and thoughts related to the timing and construct of these two projects are certainly encouraged and appreciated.

Project 1 –Enrollment Marketing Communications Plan and Creative Support

Concordia continues to refine its enrollment marketing communications plan in harmony with its evolving brand positioning strategy. As the college works to develop product distinctions as part of its strategic plan, enrollment marketing efforts must now pivot more distinctively and effectively toward that emerging reality.

In particular, based on our most current research, we are looking to distinguish the quality of our educational experience as it relates to the highly interrelated components of experiential learning, integrated career and purpose, and global competency. Of course, we recognize that in and of themselves these characteristics are not distinctive to Concordia. It is the design and delivery of these components that make all the difference.

As we partner with leaders across the college to develop a more compelling and distinctive educational *product*, we are also mindful of the high level of price sensitivity in the marketplace, which underscores our need to demonstrate affordable value with high ROI. This argument is difficult to finesse in different competitive circumstances.

For example, in our most immediate region of Fargo-Moorhead and the Red River Valley (eastern North Dakota and west central Minnesota) Concordia faces strong public competitors that offer a much lower initial tuition price point. Conversely, in the Twin Cities market of Minneapolis-St. Paul just three and a half hours away, we compete chiefly against private institutions charging significantly higher tuition than Concordia. This is a competitive quandary for Concordia: potentially seen as the “expensive” option in Moorhead and the “cheap” (read “less prestigious”) option in the Twin Cities.

Other Twin Cities challenges include the obvious strength and visibility of the University of Minnesota. Additionally, there is an unknown level of marketplace confusion with Concordia University-St. Paul, a college with which we have no affiliation. Nor are we affiliated with any other Concordia. The Twin Cities presents a much different type of battleground than what Concordia experiences in greater Minnesota and North Dakota.

Given the challenges briefly described above, our marketing communications efforts convey the themes of “go farther faster,” “called to make a difference,” and “global like no other” as core components of our brand positioning strategy. Much more detail about the construct of our brand positioning strategy accompanies this RFP invite.

Concordia seeks a partner who can quickly consume the extensive brand positioning work already done, develop an enhanced creative platform for that positioning, and follow with an enrollment marketing communications plan that effectively integrates print and digital tools. Assistance is needed with both plan creation and execution.

You may or may not choose to include a media buy plan as part of your proposal. The budget indicated for this project does not include resources for media buy creative and placement. However, Concordia does have a separate budget for media buys. Whether we pursue media buys as part of this proposal or as a complementary piece is dependent on what transpires in this RFP process.

The college already has a well-developed model with an external partner for prospect development — or “search.” What Concordia seeks is a partner that can help more effectively convert prospects into decision-ready applicants with well-conceived and customized marketing communication engagement throughout various stages of the recruitment funnel/stream. Specifically needed is a marketing communications strategy and accompanying creative execution that:

- Elevates Concordia’s brand awareness and image among student prospects
- Defines segmented/customized approaches to various demographics/geographics
- Provides particular emphasis on and support for greater application generation
- Offers creative, proven methods that will reduce our reliance on institutional aid to yield students.
- Features consistency, yet flexibility to respond to marketplace changes

The objective is to have an enhanced enrollment marketing communications strategy implemented by Aug. 1, 2014 – this would be seen as a “transitional” plan, pending the results of new research (Project 2) to be undertaken at some point in 2014-15. Following the execution of new market research, the marketing communications plan would be revised to address new market knowledge. Thus, the college is looking for a partner that would be invested in a two- to three-year collaboration, based on needs and budget realities.

Your proposal for an enrollment marketing communications strategy and accompanying creative execution plan should include the following:

- Evidence of your relevant expertise and successful experience in such endeavors
- Qualifications of those who would actually oversee, create and manage the various project components
- Process for creating effective partnership with Concordia’s in-house marketing staff
- Description of how strategy and tactics will be developed, assembled and managed as part of a cohesive, well-integrated (print and digital) execution plan
- Description of how the plan’s success will be managed and measured over time (Keep in mind the likelihood of needing to develop a “transitional” plan in year one and a revised plan for years two and following)

Feel free to construct a proposal that perhaps goes beyond or is somewhat different than what is being requested. Your expertise is likely to provide new insights as to how the challenges described in this project might be best addressed.

Project 2

Competitive awareness and image research

Concordia seeks to re-establish the practice of conducting competitive awareness and image research on a consistent basis to provide illuminating longitudinal data. The 2012-2013 Price and Positioning research does offer significant data about student prospect perceptions and preferences as they relate to Concordia and its competitors, but in somewhat broad terms.

Additional research is needed to unpack more specific and detailed intelligence about our competitive standing as it relates to key demographics and geographic regions. Well-constructed and conducted research will help us discover insights into these areas:

- Our competitive (awareness and image) status vs. named publics and privates — common and uncommon denominators.
- Varying quality/value perceptions across constituencies and regions
- Specific college choice decision factors determining the heart of our quality advantages and deficits (“gaps”)
- Level of brand confusion with other colleges named “Concordia”

Priority research subjects are 1) college-bound sophomores and juniors and 2) adult influencers. Research subjects would most likely cover four-state region in the upper Midwest, with particular emphasis (weight) on Minnesota and North Dakota. Depending on costs, we would be open to a survey of targeted new markets (2-3).

A savvy partner is needed to design and implement a thorough, but well-focused research instrument that can easily be consistently replicated over time, perhaps every two to four years as deemed most prudent and cost-effective. The research data will be used to measure and evaluate the impact of Concordia’s evolving marketing (and marketing communication) initiatives and to reshape them accordingly.

Please provide a competitive awareness and image research proposal that includes the following:

- Evidence of your relevant expertise and successful experience in such endeavors
- Description of your approach to designing and delivering actionable research
- Potential research models and approximate corresponding timelines/budgets
- Compelling picture of what your research will yield
- Process for creating effective partnership with in-house marketing staff

While the above is intended to give you a useful guide in constructing your research proposal, feel free to develop a competitive awareness and image research proposal that offers additional or different considerations that would serve Concordia College most effectively.

Project budgets

We anticipate budgeting approximately \$250,000 over a two- to three-year time period. However, we recognize that figure might need to be modified considerably pending more precise definition of what is needed to achieve the marketing goals connected to these initiatives. Accordingly, your proposal(s) would serve us best by including a range of options based on differing budget thresholds and deliverables.

Proposal information resources

To assist you in the development of your proposal, we are including the following documents for you to consult as you deem relevant.

- Concordia brand positioning strategic documents (3)
- Creative Brief developed for Concordia's August 2013 Website launch
- Concordia 2012-17 Strategic Plan outline

We share these documents trusting that you will respect the confidentiality of the proprietary information they contain. Should you ultimately be selected to partner with Concordia College, you will have access to all relevant strategic marketing data.

Proposal process

Concordia has no preference for identifying a single partner or two partners to join us in these endeavors. If we should deem that two partners would be most prudent, we will make sure that those partners are able and willing to work in synergistic harmony.

The timeline for each step in the RFP process is detailed below. Our intention is to select and invite a short list of finalists for each or both of the projects to campus at their expense to make formal presentations to members of the selection committee. Alternatively, it may be possible for the finalists to present via a web conferencing tool.

Please be as specific as possible in articulating your proposed set of deliverables and associated budget ranges. Final proposals may be submitted in print or digital form—or both as directed in the correspondence instructions that conclude this document.

Selection Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- Compelling evidence of relevant expertise, experience and high impact results
- Demonstrated creativity in producing customized vs. formulaic solutions
- Qualifications of project team to be assigned
- Ability to effectively coordinate and collaborate with internal marketing talent
- Flexibility, willingness to navigate challenges of integrating projects one and two
- Proven track record of consistently meeting deadlines and budgets

Selection Committee:

Members of the enrollment marketing communications team will recommend vendor selection. Those members are:

- Steve Schuetz, vice president for enrollment (co-chair)
- Steve Schaefer, director of enrollment marketing
- Samantha Axvig, director of recruitment
- Al Christenson, admissions representative
- Roger Degerman, sr. director, communications and marketing (co-chair)
- Amy Aasen, associate director for communications and marketing
- Erin Froslic, director of publications
- Amy Kelly, director of media relations and project management (vendor administrative assistant)

Proposal Timeline

Jan. 10	RFP distribution
Jan. 17	Deadline for notification of intent to submit proposal(s)
Jan. 20-24	Responses to proposal questions and information needs
Jan. 31	Deadline for submitting proposal(s)
Feb. 7	Finalists selected and notified
Feb. 17-27*	Presentations by finalists
March 5	Partner(s) selected and notified
March 19	Contract for scope of work, timeline, budget defined
May 1**	Contract relationship begins

* Presentation dates subject to mutual availability of committee and invited agencies

**Work start date subject to definition of contract terms and timelines

Project Communication and Coordination

All correspondence and material related to the RFP process should be directed to Amy Kelly, Office of Communications and Marketing, 901 8th St. S., Moorhead, MN 56562. You can reach her at (218) 299-3642 or akelly@cord.edu.