



Strategic Communications Plan Request for Proposal (RFP)

Background

VISION: Cool Culture envisions an equitable society that values, embraces and is enriched by all cultures.

MISSION: To amplify the voices of families and strengthen the power of historically marginalized communities through engagement with art and culture, both within cultural institutions and beyond.

ABOUT US: Cool Culture is a nonprofit BIPOC-led social justice organization that harnesses arts and culture to strengthen family and community wellbeing, to create social and systemic change, and a more just and equitable society. Since its inception 20 years ago, Cool Culture has worked to increase access to resources that: celebrate our cultures while engaging in creative practice; support families' connections with arts and culture and one another across race, class and culture; and harness arts and culture as a pathway to the human capacity for empathy. We are building a social change movement driven by families working in partnership with artists, educators, museum staff, and other committed New Yorkers invested in a shared goal of creating equity and supporting family wellbeing in community anchors – schools, early childhood programs, museums, cultural centers and more.

OUR COMMUNITY consists of: **50,000 families** annually, 83% of our families are BIPOC. 47% speak a primary language other than English, the majority face economic injustices. **More than a thousand educators from over 450 early learning programs and schools** - who speak families' languages, and reflect their demographics. Hundreds of **museum educators and cultural workers from 90 of NYC's museums**, historical societies, botanical gardens, wildlife and science centers.

Cool Culture's small team of 14 reflects the diversity of our families. We are Latinx, Black, East- and South-Asian American, LBGTQ+ and allies. We are mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, educators, policy makers, artists and authors with a deep commitment to social change.

PROGRAMS: Cool Culture programs operate at the citywide and neighborhood level. We support a network of families, early childhood centers, Title I schools, cultural institutions and artists in cultivating storytelling, relationship building, and healing through arts and culture. We believe the exchange of individual diverse stories provides a larger narrative for addressing systemic inequities.

Art is a human right. It is practiced by everyone and is everywhere: in our homes and cultural institutions, on gallery walls and on the sides of buildings, in theaters and at block parties. It is a means of self expression, collective expression, and a bridge connecting us to our ancestral stories and legacies. Art is transformative, it engages our emotional, spiritual, and political imaginations. Through art we **transform ourselves, one another, and the world.**

Culture is fundamentally shared and continually changing. It consists of languages, practices, beliefs, traditions, stories - and institutions - that families, communities and societies value and choose to preserve for the future. It is **strengthened when people** from all backgrounds come together to define and **act upon collective ideals.**

Families embody culture. They enact daily practices, impart traditions, knowledge, and language; hold history and personal narratives, **and build a foundation for future generations.** They create community when they come together and are a bridge for finding common ground and working in solidarity.

- **CityWide Cultural Access Programs** bring together a unique network and innovative programming for families that affirms NYC's diverse cultures and increases participation in the arts and culture, and include the *Cool Culture Family Pass* (free access to 90 cultural institutions for families with children birth to age 6), *Bring the Cool* family festivals,, Culture Clubs, Virtual Tours, and a forthcoming digital app.
- Our ***We Are All Curators*** suite of programs harness the power of the arts and culture to: 1) to lift up the curator in all of us by making meaning through creative expressions, to critique dominant narratives and conditions impacting families and their communities, and to support families and partners in activating creativity for justice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE VALUES: Cool Culture programs are rooted in our core ideas about art, culture and families and are created using a social justice lens.

- A.** To deepen value of our lived experiences and heritage
- B.** To deepen our understanding of and value for the lived experiences and heritage of others
- C.** To explore the way power and social structures operate within the U.S. landscape
- D.** To explore the history and strategies of resistance to the way power and social structures operate within the U.S. landscape
- E.** To understand how art is important to intellectual and human development, community building, and social change
- F.** To understand that art is located in a variety of spaces to which we are all entitled, and that should be community- and culturally-responsive
- G.** To increase opportunities to experience, create and critique art
- H.** To form or strengthen family, inter- and cross-cultural, and inter-community relationships
- I.** To build relationships through open, equitable discussion with people from different identities and lived experiences to create social change
- J.** To acquire and use skills for achieving equity, including through using art
- K.** To take actions or adopt policies that work to achieve equity

The Need

Cool Culture has a 20 year history of working in collaboration with BIPOC families, and communities. Centering families is at the heart of Cool Culture's mission, however, the challenges of the pandemic combined with significant staffing transitions have not allowed time to establish a deep understanding and integration of past learnings about families and other community members, or analysis of past communications strategies. While working in rapid response mode - shifting from in person to online programming - we have had limited opportunities for intentional engagement with families to gather information about their priorities and the impact of our initiatives.

This RFP has been designed in service of helping Cool Culture to develop organization-wide communications, narrative and cultural strategies that will activate community members in alignment with our communities' highest priorities; and with our goal of harnessing arts and

culture to create shared experiences that nurture our personal, family, institutional, and community transformation, and a more equitable City.

In particular, the Cool Culture team has identified the following areas in which additional support would be beneficial to ensuring the organization is ready to fully:

- Develop a consistent and compelling **voice**
- Craft compelling descriptions of initiatives, programs and projects that are in alignment with an organizational narrative strategy
- Create **written messaging** and resources that clearly articulate and embody the organization's mission, social change goals, and initiatives to
 - **activate** our community of 50,000+ families, educators, museum and cultural workers
 - provide deeper context to the organization's various community members and segments of prospective partners
- Invite families, educators and other Cool Culture partners to play an active and sustained role in **content creation**

The Request

Cool Culture seeks an individual consultant/firm to support and strengthen the organization's portfolio of work through providing both thought partnership and strategic recommendations, as well as developing and executing communications deliverables in collaboration with the Cool Culture team. The individual/firm will play a lead role in devising Cool Culture's strategic communications, narrative and cultural strategy. The individual consultant/firm will also create and execute an implementation support plan to secure community input, activate, and mobilize our varied communities. This communications strategy will complement and amplify Cool Culture's core social justice values, our developing Theory of Change, and initiatives, in alignment with the cultural organizing, popular education frameworks that guide our work.

We anticipate that the project will include working with members of the team to:

- **Research:** Conduct an audit of Cool Culture's current messaging.
- **Thought Leadership:** Provide thought partnership in service of Cool Culture's organizational goals that supports development and implementation of strategic communications goals and approaches.
- **Message Development & Training:** Develop a set of strategic communications, narrative strategy and content creation recommendations/guidelines which you will execute in collaboration with the Communications department. Conduct training on message development for appropriate team members
- **Infrastructure, Materials & Toolkits:** Create/Guide creation of the necessary infrastructure and tools such as visual and written templates and resources, website, blog, etc. Advise on personnel needs to fully execute strategies.
- **Reporting:** Establish a structure for regular reporting and benchmarking progress.

Our Audiences

- **Families:** Parents and caregivers of children aged birth to 6 years old; and their children (children ages birth - 18)
- **Educators:** Parent Coordinators, Family Workers, Social Workers, Teachers and Administrators in in early childhood centers (child care, Head Start, UPK) and Title I public schools serving children aged 0-6 years old and their families
- **Museum personnel:** museum educators, directors, curators and board members
- **Artists and cultural workers**
- **Government representatives:** appointed and elected , NYS and NYC officials,
- **Donors, and other supporters**

Expectations for Working Together

The consultant/firm must have a practice that is informed by a racial equity framework, and a deep understanding of equity and social justice that is actively integrated into their practice. They should bring experience partnering with BIPOC communities with demonstrated success cultivating community-centered, socially justice-aligned supporters. In line with this experience they should enjoy working in an environment that privileges collaboration and interdependence over hierarchical structures and autonomy.

Letter of Interest & Submission Instructions

Those interested in responding to this RFP should prepare a Letter of Interest (LOI) responding to the following questions:

1. What questions would you ask to shape your assessment of our strategy and our assumptions?
2. What steps would you take to identify the needs and priorities of the BIPOC families (and educators) we hope to activate to help us ensure we are meeting those needs through our initiative?
3. How do you approach working with individuals and groups of people who come from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as geographic locations?
4. Please provide a brief work plan for designing and implementing this learning and evaluation project, which we realize will be subject to change.
5. If you haven't already, please describe your team and possible collaborators you might engage.
6. What is your projected timeline for this learning and evaluation project?
7. What is the estimated budget (inclusive of travel) and desired payment schedule?

Evaluation Process & Timing

All LOIs will be evaluated on the following criteria.

1. **Project Concept and Solutions (30%)**
 - a. Understanding for the requisite scope of work
 - b. Understanding of the challenges facing Cool Cultures communities (families,

- educators, partners, etc.)
 - c. Understanding of the arts & culture environment(s)
 - d. Understanding of New York's diversity, demographics, population, and economic conditions
 - e. Capacity/ability to meet the identified schedule
- 2. Personnel and Organizational Experience, Resources, and Technical Competence to facilitate accomplishment of stated scope of work (30%)**
 - 3. Applicable Experience (30%)**
 - 4. Total Evaluated Cost (10%)**

Where to Submit Your LOI: Email proposals as a .pdf to hr@coolculture.org