REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
FOR MEDIA RELATIONS SERVICES
#C-2025-2
Issued November 3, 2025

Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System
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PART 1
PURPOSE, MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

A. PURPOSE

The Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System ("IPERS" or "System") is issuing this request for proposal (RFP) to receive proposals from qualified vendors ("Vendor") or individuals to provide professional media relations services. The selected partner will help enhance our public profile, manage media outreach and support strategic communications initiatives.

B. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

IPERS is a cost-sharing, multiple-employer, contributory defined benefit public employee pension plan created and governed pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 97B. The System covers more than 400,000 active, inactive and annuitant members. The System consists of three membership groups: Regular members, and two Special Service groups (Sheriffs/Deputy Sheriffs and Protection Occupation). Complete background information is available at www.ipers.org.

C. MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

To be considered as the Vendor for the purpose state above, respondents must meet all the following Minimum Qualifications. Failure to do so will results in rejection of the proposal.

IEPRS seeks a qualified Vendor with demonstrated expertise in strategic communications and media relations, specifically. The successful Vendor must have a proven track record of securing high-impact media coverage, crafting compelling messaging and navigating complex communications landscapes. Experience working with clients in Iowa and clients in the investment/financial management and benefits administration industries is essential.

D. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The scope of services defined in the final contract between IPERS and the Vendor will be binding and will supersede this section of the RFP if different from the scope of services defined here.
The successful Vendor will work in partnership with members of IPERS' Strategy Division to support IPERS' staff's skills as an external expert.

Annual billing is not expected to exceed $100,000.

Responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

1. Goal setting, tracking and measurement

a. Coordinate with IPERS staff to identify measurable and realistic media and public relations goals in at least two areas: 1. financial/investment management and 2. benefits/pension system administration.
b. Create a subsequent plan(s) that includes effective and creative strategies to achieve established goals.
c. Maintain a comprehensive report that itemizes pitches, coverage, reach, value, etc. IPERS will have real-time access to this report.

2. Media coordination

a. Create and maintain a list of local, regional, national and international media who cover topics such as financial/investment management, and benefits/pension system administration.
b. Coordinate with IPERS to create a digital media kit that supports media relations efforts. (Biographies, backgrounders, videos, etc.)
c. Meet with IPERS as necessary to discuss newsworthy topics.
d. Create and maintain relationships with targeted media.
e. Monitor relevant media and journalists' social media accounts to identify opportunities to build relationships and pitch stories related to the media or journalists' interest area.
f. Monthly, as determined by IPERS, pitch an established number of news stories, interview opportunities, etc.
g. On monthly basis, the Vendor will collaborate with IPERS to determine the next month's quantifiable pitching and coverage goals.
h. Attend or listen to a recording of each meeting of IPERS' Investment Board and Benefits Advisory Committee to identify newsworthy opportunities.

3. Media training

a. Provide ongoing media training, including message creation and preparation for interviews, and assessments of performance, as requested by IPERS.
b. As necessary, travel with the CEO and other staff to in-person interviews and attend virtual interviews to ensure a successful outcome.

PART 2
PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. <u>INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSALS</u>

1. Vendors responding to this RFP must provide answers to the questions posed in Parts 3-6 of this RFP. All proposals must be complete in every respect and must answer concisely and clearly all questions proposed by the RFP. Late proposals will not be accepted.

2. Proposals shall be submitted with a cover letter stating in the affirmative that the firm meets all of the Minimum Qualifications listed in Part 1.C of this RFP, that the Vendor is able and willing to provide the type and level of services required to fulfill the mandate proposed in this RFP and that the Vendor's proposal is binding for 90 days from the date of the proposal. The cover letter should also include either an affirmative compliance statement or a disclosure statement relative to IPERS' Ethics Policy (see Part 2.F below). Attach said cover letter as **<u>Appendix A</u>** to the proposal.

3. The cover letter and the offer made by the proposal, and any clarifications to that proposal shall be signed by an officer of the Vendor or a designated agent empowered to bind the Vendor in a Contract. The cover letter must also identify any sections of the proposal that the Vendor is identifying as confidential. (See Disclosure of Proposal Content below.)

4. Proposals should follow the order of questions as they are asked in Part 3 -6 of this RFP. In response to each question asked in Part 3-6, restate the **<u>main</u>** question (denoted by a number, letter or bullet point) in bold font followed by your answers stated in regular font. Responses should be thorough and answer the specific question asked, including the issues addressed in any bullet points following a question.

5. In preparation of the proposal, please use Microsoft Word format and upload as PDF files.

6. Supporting material must be clearly referenced to the appropriate question. Information and materials that are strictly promotional in nature should not be used.

7. Verbal communication with IPERS' Investment Board, Benefits Advisory Committee members and IPERS staff during the selection process is greatly discouraged. Vendors will be given the opportunity to submit written requests for clarification of questions or terms contained in the RFP. In all cases, written communications will override verbal communications. IPERS reserves the right to amend this RFP without altering the timing requirements herein. IPERS will promptly communicate any changes or addenda to this document in writing to all Vendors.

B. **<u>Proposals must be received no later than 4 p.m. Central time, December 5, 2025.</u>**

Vendors must upload one complete electronic version of its proposal and all appendices <u>here</u>. The file name should clearly indicate that it contains a proposal submitted in response to RFP #C-2025-2. If the proposal contains more than one PDF file, you may compress the files and submit in a ZIP file that clearly identifies the firm in the file name.

C. DISCLOSURE OF PROPOSAL CONTENT

1. The laws of Iowa require that the content of bidders' proposals be maintained in confidence prior to the issuance of a notice of intent to award a contract. If IPERS issues a notice of intent to award a contract at the conclusion of the selection process, the contents of all proposals, excluding confidential information, will be placed in the public domain and be open to inspection by interested parties. Trade secrets or proprietary information that are recognized as such and protected by law may be withheld, but only if designation of such sections is stated in proposing Vendors' cover letter and confidential information is clearly identified as such on each of the applicable pages within the body of the proposal.

2. Any proposal submitted that contains confidential information must be conspicuously marked on the outside as containing confidential information, and each page which confidential information appears must be conspicuously marked as containing confidential information. Identification of the entire proposal as confidential shall be deemed non-responsive and disqualify the Vendor. **If the Vendor designates any portion of the proposal as confidential, the Vendor must submit a separate electronic "excised copy" of the original proposal from which the confidential information has been excised when they submit the original (unexcised) proposal.** The confidential information must be excised in such a way as to allow the public to determine the general nature of the material removed and to retain as much of the proposal as possible.

   The Vendor's failure to request confidential treatment of material shall be deemed by IPERS as a waiver of any right to confidentiality which the Vendor may have had.

D. REJECTION OF PROPOSALS

1. IPERS reserves the right to reject without penalty any or all proposals in whole or in part received by this request, due to noncompliance with the requirements of this RFP or for any other reason. Issuance of this RFP in no way constitutes a commitment by IPERS to award a contract or to enter into a contract with a successful bidder. IPERS further reserves the right to cancel this RFP, to issue a new RFP or to award a contract in whole or in part if deemed in the best interest of IPERS. The RFP and the RFP process are for the sole benefit of IPERS and its members. IPERS will not pay for any information herein requested, nor is it liable for any costs incurred by the submitting Vendors.

2. Vendors whose proposals do not meet the minimum qualifications will be so notified. After evaluation of the proposals and approval by the IPERS, all Vendors having submitted proposals will be notified of the successful Vendor.

3. IPERS reserves the right to not hire or to defer the hiring of a Vendor for these services.

D. PROPOSAL OBLIGATIONS

The contents of the proposal and any clarifications thereto submitted by the successful Vendor shall become part of the contractual obligation and will be incorporated by reference into the ensuing Contract.

E. DISPOSITION OF PROPOSALS

All proposals become the property of IPERS.

F. COMPLIANCE WITH IPERS' ETHICS POLICY

Bidders must agree to comply with IPERS' Ethics Policy. Pursuant to that policy, the successful bidder must not be involved in any relationships with IPERS' Key Employees or with any other party providing services to IPERS that would constitute a conflict of interest, as defined in the policy, with respect to the products and/or services to be provided under this RFP. Each Bidder must provide a positive statement in its proposal's **Appendix A** affirming either that it has no such conflicts of interest, or an IPERS disclosure statement disclosing potential conflicts and requesting approval in advance.

G. IOWA STATUTES AND RULES

The terms and conditions of this RFP and the resulting Contract shall be construed in accordance with the laws of Iowa. Whenever differences exist between federal and state statutes or regulations affecting this procurement, interpretation shall be in the direction of that which is most beneficial to the interests of the State of Iowa.

H. SIGNATURE OF VENDOR'S AGENT

The offer made by the proposal, and any clarifications to that proposal, shall be signed by an officer of the Vendor or a designated agent empowered to bind the Vendor in a Contract.

I. IPERS CONTRACT SIGNATORY

Shawna Lode, Chief Strategy Officer

J. CONTRACT AWARD

IPERS reserves the right to award this Contract not necessarily to the Vendor with the highest score, or lowest fee and cost proposal, but to the Vendor that is determined to be in the best interest of IPERS based on the requirements of this RFP.

K. NONDISCRIMINATION

IPERS does not discriminate in the contract award process on the basis of sex, age, race, religion, color, national origin, disability, or any other legally protected status.

L. TAXES

IPERS is exempt from Federal Excise Taxes, and no payment will be made for any taxes levied on Vendor's employees' wages. IPERS is exempt from State and Local Sales and Use Taxes on the services. Tax Exemption Certificates will be furnished upon request.

M. APPEALS

1. *Filing an appeal*. Any Vendor that filed a timely bid or proposal and that is aggrieved by an award made by IPERS may appeal the decision by filing a written notice of appeal with Chief Executive Officer Greg Samorajski, 7401 Register Drive, Des Moines, Iowa 50321, within five calendar days of the date of award, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays and legal state holidays. IPERS must actually receive the notice of appeal within the specified time frame for it to be considered timely. The notice of appeal shall state the grounds upon which the firm challenges IPERS' award.

2. *Procedures for Vendor appeal*. The appeal will be treated as "other agency action" in accordance with Iowa Code chapter 17A and cases interpreting this Code chapter. The procedure for an appeal of "other agency action" is to allow the Vendor an opportunity to be heard. To fulfill this obligation, the Vendor has five calendar days from the date the notice of appeal was filed with IPERS to submit any written arguments and documents it wants considered related to the merits of the appeal. The aggrieved Vendor may, or may not, be afforded an opportunity to discuss the merits of the appeal with CEO Samorajski, virtually or in person. CEO Samorajski will issue a final agency decision related to the appeal. The exclusive means for a Vendor to seek further review of the final agency decision shall be covered by Iowa Code §17A.19.

N. <u>EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS</u>

IPERS will establish an Evaluation Committee ("Committee") to evaluate and score proposals received and to select the successful Vendor(s). The Committee is composed of IPERS staff.

O. <u>EVALUATION CRITERIA</u>

Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Scored Technical Requirements	**70 points**
○ Professional Experience	10 points
○ Industry Knowledge	10 points
○ Team Expertise	10 points
○ Writing and Messaging	10 points
○ Media Relationships	10 points
○ Technology and Tools	10 points
○ Compliance and Ethics	10 points
2. References	**20 points**
3. Costs	**10 points**
Total Points Possible	**100 points**

P. <u>TIMING</u>

1. **November 3, 2025**—RFP ISSUED

2. **November 14, 2025**—INQUIRES—Inquires and requests for interpretation or clarification of the RFP from potential bidders will be accepted <u>only in writing</u>, as mailed or e-mailed, only if received no later than 4 p.m. Central time on October 24, 2025. Mail or e-mail questions to:

Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System
Attn: Shawna Lode
7401 Register Drive
Des Moines, IA 50321
E-mail: shawna.lode@ipers.org

3. **November 19, 2025**—RESPONSES TO INQUIRIES—Responses to and addenda resulting from requests for interpretation shall be posted at www.ipers.org by 4 p.m. Central time.
4. **November 28, 2025**—PROPOSALS DUE—Proposals must be received by 4 p.m. Central time.
5. **December 8, 2025** (Tentative)—ANNOUNCEMENT OF SELECTION—IPERS will notify all Vendors that submitted a proposal of its selection, which shall be subject to successful contract negotiation with the selected Vendor.
6. **January 1, 2026**—CONTRACT IS EFFECTIVE

O. THE RESULTING CONTRACT

The Contract shall be a combination of the specifications, terms and conditions of the RFP, any written clarifications or changes made to this RFP, the offer contained in the successful proposal and any additional contractual terms and conditions agreed to mutually and in writing by the parties.

P. TERM OF CONTRACT

The initial term of the contract for the selected Vendor(s) shall be three (3) years and shall be eligible for up to one three (3) year extension, subject to mutual agreement. However, the resulting contract will allow termination at IPERS' discretion, with or without cause, after thirty (30) days written notice to the Vendor.

Q. PERFORMANCE-BASED FEES

Iowa Code §8.47 places a requirement on state agencies that service Contracts must contain a performance-based payment clause. The administrative rule, 11 Iowa Administrative Code 107.4, describes the acceptable types of performance-based payment clauses.

An acceptable performance-based payment clause that all bidders must include in their responses to the RFP can place the entire payment for all deliverables in the Contract at risk, or selected deliverables at risk. For the purpose of illustration only, an example might be:

Contractor will provide the deliverable(s) specified in Part X, paragraph XX, by July 1, 202X. In the event that the deliverable(s) in Part X, paragraph XX, are not delivered by July 1, 202X, Contractor will forfeit [certain percentage of the invoice] [$X amount] [will subtract $XXXX/day until delivery is made to IPERS].

Each bidder must propose performance-based fees in its response to the RFP. IPERS encourages bidders to be creative. The Evaluation Committee will evaluate the performance- based fee proposals for each bidder. The performance-based fee proposals will be subject to final negotiations with the bidder selected pursuant to this RFP.

PART 3
QUESTIONNAIRE

A. **ORGANIZATION AND OWNERSHIP**

1. Provide the following information:
    a. Date of response
    b. Name of Vendor
    c. Primary contact person
    d. Title
    e. Address
    f. Telephone number
    g. Email address

2. Describe the background and ownership of the Vendor. Describe any material changes in organization structure or ownership that have occurred in the past five years.
    a. Year Vendor was formed.
    b. The ownership structure. Indicate all entities that have an ownership stake in the Vendor (name and percentage).
    c. Affiliated companies or joint ventures.
    d. Recent or planned changes to the ownership or organization structure.
    e. Vendor's headquarters location.
    f. Location(s) where services to IPERS will be performed.
    g. Is the Vendor a Targeted Small Business?

B. MANDATORY SCORED TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

All items listed below are Mandatory Scored Technical Requirements. The Evaluation Committee will review and score these in accordance with Section 2, Evaluation Criteria. All requirements must be met.

1. Professional Experience
    a. Explain your organization's years of experience in media relations, public relations~~,~~ and/or strategic communications.
    b. Explain your organization's record of securing media coverage in national, regional, local and industry-specific outlets.
    c. Explain your organization's ability to provide in-person services as requested by IPERS.

2. Industry Knowledge
    a. Explain your organization's familiarity with financial/investment management and pensions/benefits administration industries and their media landscape.
    b. Explain your understanding of current trends and challenges in media engagement in the industries identified above.

3. Team Expertise
    a. Explain your team's expertise in media strategy, writing and pitching.

   b. Explain the professional experience of the person who would be primarily assigned to the account.
   c. Explain the professional experience of any other people who will work on the account.

4. **Writing and Messaging**
   a. Provide two examples of writing/messaging employees of your organization created and used to successfully procure earned media.
   b. Explain your organization's experience crafting compelling narratives that align with client goals.

5. **Media Relationships**
   a. Explain your organization's established relationships with journalists, editors, producers, bloggers, podcast hosts, etc. in the finance/investment management and/or pension/benefits administration industries.
   b. Explain your organization's ability to leverage media contacts to secure coverage.

6. **Technology and Tools**
   a. Explain your organization's proficiency in using media monitoring and analytics platforms. (e.g., Meltwater, Cision, Muck Rack)
   b. Explain your organization's ability to provide regular reports on media coverage and campaign performance.
   c. Explain the model your organization uses to assign value to earned media.

7. **Compliance and Ethics**
   a. Explain your organization's adherence to ethical standards and best practices in public and media relations.

Part 4
Fees and Other Cost Information

All respondents must provide a detailed cost proposal that includes the following. Fee information shall be fixed for the first three years of the contract. Fees to be used in subsequent years shall be limited by an escalator clause. Please propose an escalator clause percentage, if any.

1. **Fee Structure**
   a. Clearly outline your pricing model (e.g., hourly rates, project-based fees).
   b. Specify rates for each team member or role, if applicable.
   c. Include any minimum engagement thresholds or required commitments.

2. **Estimated Budget**
   a. Break down costs by deliverables, phases, or services (e.g., media outreach, press release development, crisis communications support).

3. **Additional Expenses**
   a. Identify any anticipated out-of-pocket costs (e.g., travel, media monitoring tools, wire distribution fees).

4. **Optional Services**
   - List any optional or add-on services with associated costs.
   - Indicate whether these services are recommended or discretionary.

5. **Invoicing**
   - Describe your standard invoicing schedule.
   - Note any discounts for early payment or long-term contracts.

Part 5
References

Vendor shall provide a minimum of two but not more than four references for which the Vendor has completed work similar in scope and budget to the information included in Section 1, Purpose. For each reference, provide the organization name, contact person, phone number, email address, length of relationship and a summary of the work performed for that client.

PART 7
REQUIRED APPENDICES

Appendix A – Cover Letter, Part 2.A.2
Appendix B – Organization and Ownership, Part 3.A.1-2
Appendix C – Mandatory Scored Technical Requirement, Part 3.B.1-7
Appendix D – Fees and Other Cost Information, Part 4.1-5
Appendix E – References, Part 5