# RFP COE-COMM-001: Written Responses to Proposer Questions

Strategic Communications and Public Relations Services for the Center of Excellence · Issued Oct 27, 2026 · Rhenodda Moton, COE Program Manager

## Purpose

Bowie BIC issues these written responses under Section 22.5 of RFP COE-COMM-001 to all known proposers at the same time. Questions are listed without the name of the firm that asked them. These responses clarify the RFP; where a response differs from the RFP, the response governs. All other RFP terms are unchanged, including the November 2, 2026 proposal deadline.

## Questions and answers

**Question 1. Ongoing support.** What level of effort or service cadence does Bowie BIC anticipate for ongoing public affairs, stakeholder engagement, issues monitoring, and time-sensitive requests? Does media outreach include active pitching and follow-up, in addition to strategy and materials development?

**Answer.** Bowie BIC does not set a fixed number of hours. The minimum cadence is in Section 4.7: one strategy meeting each month, one written report each quarter, and public affairs and stakeholder support on an as-needed basis throughout the term. Section 5.1(h) requires a response to Bowie BIC requests within two business days, or sooner for time-sensitive matters. Proposers should state the level of effort they assume, as required by Section 8.2(d).

Yes, media outreach includes active pitching and follow-up. Section 5.3(a) measures success in part by media placements and earned coverage, so proposals should include outreach to secure placements, not only strategy and materials.

**Question 2. Content and production.** Are the required stories and profiles primarily written deliverables? Are original photography, video production, travel, or on-site event coverage expected within the annual budget?

**Answer.** Yes, the stories, features, case studies and profiles in Section 4.7 are primarily written deliverables. Original photography, video production and on-site event coverage are not required. Proposers may offer them as optional services, priced separately under

Section 8.2(e) and (f). Most interviews can be conducted virtually. Any travel must be identified and priced separately in the cost proposal.

**Question 3. Publishing responsibilities.** Will Bowie BIC manage website updates, social media publishing, and newsletter distribution, or should proposers include those responsibilities?

**Answer.** Bowie BIC will publish content to its website, social media channels and newsletter. The Contractor will provide publication-ready content and a recommended publishing schedule. For the digital engagement measures in Section 5.3(d), Bowie BIC will share available website and social media analytics with the Contractor.

**Question 4. Data, access, and approvals.** What staff support and existing resources will be available for outcome data, participant introductions, interview scheduling, and content approvals? Is there an anticipated approval turnaround?

**Answer.** The COE Program Manager will be the Contractor's primary point of contact. The Program Manager will provide available program data and reports, introduce the Contractor to participants and partners, and help schedule interviews. The Program Manager reviews and approves content. Public statements, news releases and other external announcements also require approval by the Executive Director. Bowie BIC's target is to return comments or approval within five business days of receiving a deliverable.

**Question 5. Story count.** Section 4.7 specifies 14 stories across participant success stories, HBCU features, small business case studies, and leadership profiles. Section 5.3 identifies a target of at least 15 documented stories. Should proposers budget for 15 completed, publication-ready stories, or does the latter include stories documented in the story bank?

**Answer.** Budget for 14 completed, publication-ready stories, the minimum in Section 4.7: six participant success stories, three HBCU partner features, three small business case studies and two leadership profiles. The target of 15 in Section 5.3 refers to stories documented in the COE Story Bank. It includes the 14 completed stories plus at least one more story documented in the Story Bank with its audience, key messages, status and supporting information. That additional story does not need to be developed into a finished, publication-ready piece.

**Question 6. Team qualifications.** May proposers include named specialist subcontractors, subject to Bowie BIC's approval, and use their relevant experience and references to demonstrate the proposed team's qualifications?

**Answer.** Yes. Proposers may name specialist subcontractors and describe each one's role, qualifications and relevant experience as part of the proposed team. Under Section 12.4, any subcontracting requires Bowie BIC's prior written consent, and approved subcontractors are bound by the same terms as the Contractor. Subcontractor key personnel are subject to Section 5.4 on substitutions. The three references required by Section 7.1(l) must come from clients served by the Proposer. Proposers may add subcontractor references in addition to those three.

**Question 7. Scope adjustments.** How will additional requests beyond the agreed deliverables and level of effort be prioritized and approved within the annual budget?

**Answer.** Under Section 4.8, the Contractor may recommend changes to the content and engagement mix, subject to Bowie BIC's approval. Additional requests will be prioritized at the monthly strategy meeting. The COE Program Manager must approve any work beyond the agreed deliverables in writing before it begins. Any change to the contract value requires a written amendment under Section 12.6. Proposers should explain how they would handle requests beyond the agreed scope and the rate they would apply.

**Question 8. Current support and incumbent.** Are all or any part of the services outlined in this RFP currently being provided by an external communications or public relations firm? If so, please identify the incumbent, services, current contract value and period of performance.

**Answer.** No. No external communications or public relations firm currently provides the services in this RFP for the COE. There is no incumbent contractor.

**Question 9. Purpose of the solicitation.** Is this solicitation intended to replace an existing contract, expand current communications capabilities or establish a new scope of services?

**Answer.** This solicitation establishes a new scope of services for the COE. It does not replace an existing contract.

**Question 10. Participation in developing the RFP.** Did any current or previous communications contractors participate in developing the RFP, scope of work, evaluation criteria or procurement strategy?

**Answer.** No. Bowie BIC staff developed the RFP, scope of work, evaluation criteria and procurement strategy. No current or previous communications contractor took part.

**Question 11. Conflict of interest policies.** Does Bowie BIC have conflict-of-interest policies governing vendor participation when a firm's principals or executives serve on the governing or advisory boards of Bowie BIC's institutional partners, including Bowie

State University?

**Answer.** Yes. Section 15.1 requires each Proposer to disclose in its proposal any actual, potential or apparent conflict of interest, including personal or business relationships with COE stakeholders and partners. A principal or executive serving on the governing or advisory board of a Bowie BIC partner, including Bowie State University, must be disclosed. Disclosure does not by itself disqualify a Proposer. Bowie BIC will review each disclosure and may require mitigation, recusal or other measures under Section 15.4. Section 20.5 requires each Proposer to certify that it has disclosed all such conflicts.

**Question 12. Role of Bowie State University in the evaluation.** What role, if any, will Bowie State University representatives have in reviewing proposals, evaluating respondents or selecting the successful contractor? This includes board members of Bowie State University.

**Answer.** None. Proposals will be reviewed, scored and selected by a Bowie BIC evaluation committee under Section 9.0. Bowie State University representatives, including members of its board, will not review proposals, evaluate respondents or take part in selecting the contractor. Each evaluation committee member will confirm that they have no conflict of interest with any Proposer before scoring.

**Question 13. What the budget covers.** Does the anticipated annual budget of $50,000 to $75,000 include all anticipated expenses, including paid media placement, creative production, printing, travel and other direct costs, or would these be funded separately? If yes, what portion of the budget is expected for these direct costs, and for which categories or deliverables?

**Answer.** Yes. The $50,000 to $75,000 range in Section 8.1 is the total anticipated annual contract value, including fees and all direct costs. Paid media placement and advertising buys are not part of this scope. Printing is not expected, since deliverables are primarily digital. Bowie BIC has not set a portion of the budget for direct costs. Proposers should itemize any direct costs, such as travel or optional production, as required by Section 8.2(e) and (f), and keep the total proposal within the anticipated range.

**Question 14. Existing strategies and assets.** Are there established communications strategies, branding guidelines, media relationships or existing communications assets that the selected contractor would be expected to build upon? If yes, please share.

**Answer.** The COE does not have a formal communications strategy, brand guidelines or established media relationships. Developing them is part of Phase I (Sections 4.2 and 4.3). The Contractor will build on Bowie BIC's existing logo and visual identity, its website and

LinkedIn page, the COE participant Slack channel, and existing program presentations and reports. The COE and COE 2.0 Overview provided with these responses describes these existing communications.

**Question 15. Out-of-state firms.** Are firms headquartered outside of Maryland eligible to submit proposals?

**Answer.** Yes. Firms headquartered outside Maryland may submit proposals. Under Section 16.2, the selected Contractor must be registered to do business in Maryland if the law requires it.

**Question 16. In-person presence.** What level of in-person presence is expected for meetings, stakeholder interviews, and events?

**Answer.** Most work can be done virtually, including the monthly strategy meetings and most stakeholder interviews. Occasional in-person attendance at COE events in the Bowie, Maryland area may be requested. Proposers should state the in-person presence they propose and price any travel separately in the cost proposal.

**Question 17. Teams and subcontractor consent.** May firms submit as a team or with a named subcontractor? If so, does naming the subcontractor in the proposal satisfy the prior written consent requirement in Section 12.4?

**Answer.** Yes, firms may submit as a team or with named subcontractors (see Question 6). Naming a subcontractor in the proposal does not by itself satisfy Section 12.4. Bowie BIC will give written consent for approved subcontractors in the Professional Services Agreement. Any subcontractor added later requires separate written consent before it begins work.

**Question 18. Review, acceptance and payment.** What is the anticipated review and acceptance period for deliverables, and the payment timeline once a deliverable is accepted?

**Answer.** Bowie BIC's target is to return comments or acceptance within five business days of receiving a deliverable. Under Section 8.5, payments will be monthly or quarterly, based on completed and accepted deliverables. Bowie BIC anticipates paying within 30 days of receiving a correct invoice for accepted deliverables. Final payment terms will be set in the Professional Services Agreement.

**Question 19. Mobilization payment.** Would Bowie BIC consider an initial mobilization payment at project kickoff?

**Answer.** No advance or mobilization payment is anticipated. Under Section 8.5, payments are tied to completed and accepted deliverables. Proposers may propose an early first payment tied to an initial Phase I deliverable, such as the Communications and Public Affairs Assessment.

**Question 20. Direct costs and the budget range.** Should the $50,000 to $75,000 range include all direct costs (such as wire distribution, monitoring tools, photography, video, and travel), or may those be proposed in addition to the fee?

**Answer.** All direct costs needed to deliver the required services, including wire distribution, media monitoring tools and travel, must be included within the $50,000 to $75,000 range and itemized under Section 8.2(e) and (f). Services the RFP does not require, such as photography and video production, may be shown as separately priced options. Bowie BIC may accept or decline each option.

**Question 21. Funding and term.** Is funding secured for the full one-year term, and how does the contract term align with the SBA award period of performance?

**Answer.** The contract is funded through the COE's SBA Federal Assistance Award. The award's current period of performance ends August 31, 2027. The initial contract term is one year from the agreement's effective date under Section 11.1. Services after August 31, 2027 are subject to the availability of funding, and the Professional Services Agreement will include a funding-contingency provision. Renewal options under Section 11.2 are also subject to available funding.

**Question 22. Publishing.** Will the Contractor publish content directly to COE channels (website, social media, newsletter), or provide publication-ready content for COE staff to publish?

**Answer.** The Contractor will provide publication-ready content and a recommended publishing schedule. Bowie BIC will publish it to the COE's website, social media and newsletter (see Question 3).

**Question 23. Consent and releases.** Who is responsible for securing participant and partner consent and media releases for success stories?

**Answer.** The COE Program Manager will introduce the Contractor to participants and partners and will obtain each person's consent and signed media release using Bowie BIC's release form. The Contractor must confirm that a signed release is on file before a story is published or distributed. The Contractor may recommend changes to the release form.

**Question 24. Brand guidelines.** Does the COE currently have brand guidelines, or is visual brand development within scope?

**Answer.** The COE does not have formal brand guidelines. A brand positioning and messaging framework is within scope (Sections 4.3 and Phase III). New visual brand development, such as a new logo or visual identity system, is not within scope. The Contractor will work within Bowie BIC's existing logo and visual identity.

**Question 25. Incumbent.** Is there an incumbent or previous communications vendor for the COE?

**Answer.** No. There is no incumbent or previous communications vendor for the COE (see Question 8).

**Question 26. Page limit.** Does the cost proposal count toward the 15-page limit? Do the cover page and table of contents count?

**Answer.** Yes, the cost proposal counts toward the 15-page limit, since it is a required proposal component under Section 7.1(n). The cover page, table of contents and signed certification do not count. Resumes, references, work samples and appendices are also excluded under Section 7.2.

**Question 27. Certification template.** Is there a required template for the signed certification and disclosures, or may proposers provide their own?

**Answer.** There is no required template. Proposers may provide their own signed certification. It must be signed by an authorized representative and cover the certification in Section 7.4 and the representations, certifications and disclosures in Section 20.0.

**Question 28. SAM.gov and UEI.** Is SAM.gov registration or a UEI number required for this engagement?

**Answer.** SAM.gov registration and a UEI are not required to submit a proposal. Because the engagement is federally funded, Bowie BIC will confirm that the selected Contractor is not listed in the SAM.gov exclusions, consistent with the certification in Section 20.4. Proposers that already have a UEI should include it in their company background.

**Question 29. References.** Would references from nonprofit and private-sector clients for comparable storytelling and public affairs work be acceptable?

**Answer.** Yes. Under Section 7.1(l), references must come from clients for whom the Proposer provided similar services within the past five years. Nonprofit and private-sector clients are acceptable. Under Section 6.2, experience with SBA programs, federal

initiatives, HBCUs, higher education or public-sector organizations will receive preference.

**Question 30. How communications are managed today.** Does COE currently work with an incumbent communications agency, or are communications managed internally across both Bowie BIC and BSU entities?

**Answer.** There is no incumbent agency (see Question 8). COE communications are managed internally by Bowie BIC staff. Bowie State University manages its own institutional communications. This contract is with Bowie BIC for the COE.

**Question 31. The COE 2.0 model.** Could COE provide additional context on the COE 2.0 execution-focused model?

**Answer.** COE 2.0 moves participants from training and readiness to measurable contracting results (Section 1.3). It runs on a two-track model:

- Track 1, HBCU Federal Readiness: builds foundational federal contracting readiness for HBCUs and ends with a documented readiness decision.
- Track 1A, Enhanced Readiness Support: a sub-track of Track 1 that gives targeted support to HBCUs not yet ready for Track 2, followed by reassessment.
- Track 2, HBCU and 8(a) Strategic Partnership and Execution: matches federal-ready HBCUs with qualified SBA 8(a) firms for teaming, capture, proposals, contract performance and growth.

SBA 8(a) firms are assessed separately and join Track 2 once qualified. AI tools support assessment, research and reporting, and COE staff approve every placement and matching decision. The COE and COE 2.0 Overview provided with these responses has more detail.

**Question 32. Priorities, audiences and outcomes.** Are there specific public affairs priorities, target audiences, or desired outcomes COE would like the contractor to address, such as increasing awareness, strengthening stakeholder relationships, or elevating COE's visibility within the federal contracting landscape?

**Answer.** Yes, all three. Section 8.4 sets the priorities: developing the COE's overall story, documenting measurable impact, strengthening stakeholder awareness and engagement, supporting public affairs, advancing COE 2.0 positioning, and increasing the COE's visibility and strategic relationships. Priority audiences are federal agencies and SBA partners, HBCUs, SBA 8(a) firms and small businesses, industry partners and prime contractors, higher education, community organizations and funders (Sections 1.3 and

4.2(e)). Long-term sustainability is also a priority: the COE's current federal funding ends in 2027, so communications should help build the relationships and visibility that support future funding (Section 4.1(j)). The measures are in Section 5.3.

**Question 33. Page limit.** Does the 15-page proposal limit include the cover page and table of contents, or are these excluded from the page count?

**Answer.** The cover page and table of contents are excluded from the 15-page limit (see Question 26).

**Question 34. Digital engagement.** What level of ongoing digital engagement does COE expect under this requirement? Is the contractor expected to actively manage and optimize digital channels, or primarily develop supplementary storytelling content to communicate and promote COE's impact?

**Answer.** The contractor is not expected to manage COE digital channels day to day. Bowie BIC publishes content to its website, social media and newsletter (see Question 3). The contractor develops the digital communications strategy (Phase III), provides publication-ready content including at least one social media storytelling piece each month (Section 4.7), and recommends optimizations. Using analytics Bowie BIC shares, the contractor tracks and reports digital engagement against baselines each quarter (Section 5.3(d)).

**Question 35. Work samples.** Can we include brief summaries of the work performed as part of the submitted work samples in the proposal, or does COE prefer completed deliverables?

**Answer.** Completed deliverables are preferred. A brief summary may accompany each sample to explain the client, the work performed and the results. Under Section 7.2, work samples do not count toward the 15-page limit.

## Supporting materials

The following materials under Section 24.1 are provided to all proposers with these responses:

- COE and COE 2.0 Overview (attached), covering Bowie BIC, the COE and its services, the COE 2.0 two-track model, priority audiences and current communications
- Program statistics (summary below)

Year 3 program statistics (SBA reporting period September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2026):

| Measure | Result |
|---|---|
| SBA 8(a) companies trained | 35 |
| Training and support sessions | 47 |
| Participants mentored | 35 |
| BSU FCCA certificates of completion | 64 |
| HBCUs engaged | 17 |
| SBA 8(a) firms engaged | 30 |

Source: Year 3 SBA performance reporting.

## Key dates and contact

| Milestone | Date |
|---|---|
| Written questions due | October 23, 2026, 5:00 PM Eastern |
| Written responses (Q&A) issued to all proposers | October 27, 2026 |
| Proposals due (PDF, by email) | November 2, 2026, 5:00 PM Eastern |
| Proposal review | November 3 to 6, 2026 |
| Interviews, if needed | November 9 to 10, 2026 |
| Award notification | November 12, 2026 |
| Contract execution | November 13 to 17, 2026 |
| Project kickoff | November 23, 2026 |

Under Section 22.6, all communication about this RFP must go through the designated contact until award. Contact with any other Bowie BIC employee, officer, director or representative about the RFP may result in disqualification.

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