



America 250-Ohio Commission
Public Relations Agency
Request for Qualifications/Proposal

RFQ Issue Date: May 17 2023

Inquiry Period: May 17, 2023-May 24, 2023 (12:00 p.m. - Eastern)

Qualifications statements due: June 5, 2023 (4:00 p.m. - Eastern)

Review and Scoring Period: June 6, 2023-June 16, 2023

Notification of short-list: June 20, 2023

Interviews with short-listed firms: June 29, 2023

Notification of Selection: June 30, 2023

Submit Responses via e-mail to:

Chris Hurtubise, Communications Director

America 250-Ohio Commission

churtubise@ohiohistory.org

Project Background:

In 2026, the United States will celebrate its semiquincentennial, which is the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Each state has been encouraged to create a celebration and commemoration of this anniversary to reflect the unique character and contributions of each state to the nation over the past 250 years.

Ohio is fully embracing this opportunity. The Ohio Commission for the Semiquincentennial (aka America 250-Ohio Commission or AM250-OH) was created by the Ohio legislature and launched on March 1, 2022. The charge of the AM250-OH Commission is to "...to plan, encourage, develop, and coordinate the commemoration of the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United States and the impact of Ohioans on the nation's past, present, and future." —Ohio Revised Code (149.309)

- PLAN Ohio's approach to commemorate/celebrate the U.S.'s 250th Anniversary in 2026.
- ENCOURAGE all 88 Counties to get involved and create local plans while joining other efforts in the region, across the state and throughout the nation.
- DEVELOP a public awareness campaign, a collaborative vision, and a strategic approach to the statewide plans.
- COORDINATE collective impact opportunities to partner, expand impact, and share resources.

AM250-OH is a non-profit organization, funded primarily through State of Ohio funds that are managed by the Ohio History Connection as the Commission's fiscal agent. The Commission has a small staff and is overseen by a state-appointed Commission of 30 members. While not a state agency per se, AM250-OH is adhering to the basic guidelines of State of Ohio procurement, by selecting the Public Relations (firm) partner through an open and competitive process.

The events and products of the America 250-Ohio celebrations may include experiences such as:

- Statewide film festival celebrating Ohio’s contribution to the film industry
- Identifying Revolutionary War Veteran’s graves (there are over 7,000 in Ohio)
- Improvements to Ohio’s only Revolutionary War fort – Fort Laurens, in Tuscarawas County
- U.S. Route 250/America 250 Heritage Trail
- Ohio Road Trips and Discovery Trails
- The collection and sharing of under-told and little-known stories of Ohioans (past and present)
- Opening the 1976-time capsule at the Ohio State Fair and creating a new one
- Urban murals and barn paintings

There are expected to be hundreds of events and experiences offered during the 2024-2026 timeframe.

The Need:

AM250-OH has a small staff with a large set of objectives and needs the assistance of professional services to accomplish our many goals. The staff includes a communications director who will be the agency’s main point of contact. The selected firm will act as an extension of the AM250-OH team to provide resources and capacity not possible through the Commission staff alone.

To meet the needs of the charge to “develop a public awareness campaign” it will be imperative to have a strong earned media component to the marketing mix. There will be numerous quality opportunities to secure media throughout the three-year period (2024-2026).

Situation:

The awareness of the U.S. 250th anniversary is limited, particularly in states that were not part of the original 13 colonies. Many Americans, including Ohioans may question why we should be celebrating the 250th anniversary when the country is so seemingly divided and polarized. Moreover, a celebration of this time could be construed as “not for me” for any number of reasons including from those whose stories are typically untold or minimized by history.

There is a national America 250 organization, responsible for any nationwide celebration elements or moments. The national organization will also work to support state level activities. In addition, the American Association for State & Local History (AASLH) is actively convening and coordinating with state-level Commissions as a type of coordinating body. To-date, 35 states have created Commissions to prepare for the anniversary. Some state’s plans are well underway while other Commissions are just getting started.

Ohio is considered one of the leading states in preparing for the celebration. We have momentum and strong support from Governor DeWine who often says, “This is Ohio’s time.”

Ohio’s approach will be comprehensive in scope, inclusive of the history and stories of American Indians and the European settlers who settled in modern day Ohio. Our aim will be to bring people together for America’s 250th and accurately portray Ohio’s place in the national narrative.

Ohio is a microcosm of the United States with stories and content that can coalesce into an amazing opportunity to inform, inspire, and engage the public and encourage them to participate in what will likely be hundreds of events and conversations.

Desired outcomes:

- Create measurable awareness for AM250-OH and related initiatives that will drive traffic to America250-Ohio.org; build affinity lists for email and digital marketing and result in participation in America 250-Ohio events.
- Media exposure such as:
 - Stories in every major Ohio newspaper
 - A feature in at least one national publication about Ohio's approach and/or content (i.e., USA Today, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, etc.)
 - A feature in one major travel publication
 - Media tour for our Executive Director and/or key spokesperson for numerous radio and TV hits
 - Stories in local/smaller news outlets about events in their community region
 - Develop a network of social media influencers who write and post about and support the AM250-OH events
 - Stories and special sections in periodicals such as Long Weekends, Ohio Magazine, city magazines, regional parent magazines, Midwest Living, and the like.

Scope of Work:

1. Public Relations – the firm will have a focus on media relations to support and secure statewide earned media to support both the projects that are under the Commission's direct domain and those created by others. The desired activities will include but not be limited to:
 - a. Develop and execute an overall PR strategy and plan for the Commission and related initiatives
 - b. Develop and pitch stories to media of all types including print, radio, TV, digital, bloggers and influencers.
 - c. Develop a basic crisis communication plan as well as advise and assist with any crisis communications, should the need arise
 - d. Advise and assist the Commission on developing relationships with key media outlets
 - e. Serve as a proactive partner in finding/developing opportunities for stories, pitches, and content for owned media.
2. Identify and nurture blogger and influencer contacts to secure non-traditional media that can help drive web and social media traffic.
3. Provide writing services as needed to help with AM250-OH's blog and social media
4. Messaging development – work in close partnership with the AM250-OH team and representatives to develop an overall messaging theme that can be used as an overarching theme that can provide direction for a robust content strategy.
5. Affinity group and audience identification – from time to time, the firm may be called upon to help client develop affinity lists of potential organizations that can support initiatives with communications support.
6. Social media support – while the firm will not be responsible for day-to-day social media, it would be expected that the firm would provide guidance, proactive ideas, and opportunities to assist client in growing social media following and engagement.
7. Assist with developing a tool kit including messaging, sample posts, etc., for convention and visitors bureaus, partner organizations, etc.

8. Assist where needed to develop partnerships with key cultural institutions and/or potential sponsors when opportunities are identified.
9. Media event staffing (as needed).

Possible services that could be put out to bid and/or secured from PR firm but may also be contracted separately by AM250-OH at their sole discretion.

1. Video services – concepting, managing, writing, shooting, editing, etc. to create videos as needed to support the work of AM250-OH.
2. Media placement services – ability to purchase and leverage paid media at the best rates including developing a media strategy to stretch limited funds and/or leverage them with other entities or in-kind media with an emphasis on digital media.
3. Creative services – ability to create ad and promotional messaging and advertising, key art, rolled-out in various forms which could include TV, radio, print, out-of-home, digital, etc.

The successful firm will have the following qualities:

1. Demonstrated experience and success with pitching and securing stories with statewide media across the various media types in the related categories to AM250-OH including travel and tourism.
2. Sufficient and assigned staff to provide regular monitoring of the client, creating opportunities for earned media, providing ideas on how to approach stories and a heads-up approach to innovative ideas on how to generate interest on an on-going basis.
3. Track record of working with other creative collaborators in a non-competitive, client-focused strategy to assist in developing a coordinated and effective campaign.

The firm will be expected to provide the appropriate media tracking and reporting software and bi-weekly and on-demand reports.

Preferred qualities:

1. Experience working with other state agencies and familiarity with state government.
2. Strong and recent experience working in at least one (1) related field such as travel and tourism, history, arts and culture, festivals, attractions, etc.
3. WBE/MBE firm and demonstrated diversity within the team
4. Experience working with and communicating to diverse audience segments
5. Ohio-based or high familiarity and experience working with Ohio-based audiences
6. Strong and measurable experience with securing statewide/regional earned media in the past two years.

Requirements:

1. Firm must be based in the United States
2. Provide rates estimation. Rates must be a combined hourly rate for any/all billed hours, regardless of the level of staff working on the project.
3. Firms must submit estimated hours to accomplish projects at the time of proposal to estimate overall potential cost (the projects will be scoped with hours, etc., once the firm has been selected and the projects become actionable).

4. Firm's rate proposal should include how regular meetings, phone calls and other on-going communications such as Teams, Slack, texts, etc. are to be billed.
5. Submit the credentials of the key, regular team who would work on the account including their role, related expertise and experience.

The intent is to enter into a one-year agreement with the opportunity to renew each year of the Commission's work, making this a multi-year opportunity, provided both parties are satisfied with the arrangements and agree to continue to work together. Renewal discussions would take place sixty (60) days before the end of the current agreement year. Fees and rates could be reviewed at that time, with the reasonable expectation that fees would not appreciably increase year-to-year.

Submission Guidelines:

What to include:

1. Company profile: Please include an overview of your organization and any subcontractor/collaborators including the following information:
 1. Brief company history, with number of years of relevant experience
 2. Number of years in business, the number of employees, office locations
 3. Any certifications such as certified MBE or WBE
 4. Company office locations – office that will provide services as well as any other office locations of more than one employee (please do not include remote workers' offices as a location).
2. Proposed account team – for each regular member of the account team that would service the account, please include their name, experience, role, and a link to a profile (can be LinkedIn).
3. Prior experience – please include a short-write up of three (3) recent (within the last three years) projects that the firm has completed that are similar in scope, size and relatable to this project. Include a note of who on the proposed work account team was involved in those projects.
 - a. Include the following for each project:
 - i. Client name/Project name
 - ii. Project date
 - iii. Team members (from the firm) involved
 - iv. Services provided
 - v. Situation/Challenge addressed
 - vi. Solution
 - vii. Results
4. Approach – please provide a brief statement of how you will approach working with AM250-OH to ensure success including onboarding, any relevant milestones, etc.
5. Statement of interest – please provide a brief statement as to why you believe your firm is best suited for this work and why you would like to have the opportunity to work with AM250-OH.
6. Fee statement – provide the proposed combined hourly rate for services and estimates to accomplish the various components included in the scope of work.

Submission Format:

1. Respond in a written format (can be a Word document or PowerPoint), may be saved as a pdf.

2. The length is not to exceed ten (10) pages one-sided or five (5) pages two-sided, including the cover page.
3. Limit the number of links to content and ensure that it is directly relevant and cannot be shown/expressed in any other way.
4. Please number each page
5. Follow the same order for submission as listed above.

Question period – all submitted in writing via [Google form](#), answers will be made public to anyone wishing to submit via [Google Sheets spreadsheet](#).

Question form to be used for all questions (note – no questions posed via email or phone will be answered, the form is to be the only method of asking questions during the inquiry period:

Proposal Submittal:

Proposals must be submitted via email by no later than June 5, 2023, at 4:00 p.m. ET to churtubise@ohiohistory.org.

Any submissions received after that time will not be eligible for review and consideration.

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Note: the schedule is solely under the domain of the America 250-Ohio Commission and may change as needed.

Terms and Conditions for Submission:

Proposing firms are advised there will be no opportunity to correct mistakes or deficiencies in their submitted materials after the proposal due date. Proposals that are incomplete or otherwise missing required information may not be evaluated.

It is the proposing firm's responsibility to ensure the timely submission of a complete proposal. Late proposals will not be scored. America 250-Ohio is under no obligation to consider a proposal which is received after the proposal deadline or that is incomplete. Proposals not submitted in the format requested will not be scored.

No supplementary or revised materials will be accepted after the proposal due date unless specifically requested by AM250-OH.

All costs incurred in preparing the proposal shall be borne by the proposing firm alone, and AM250-OH shall not contribute to the cost of the proposal preparation.

AM250-OH reserves the right to:

- Negotiate with proposing firm(s), within the requirements of this RFQ, to best serve the interests of America 250-OH.
- Require the submission of modifications or additions to proposals as a condition of further participation in the selection process.
- Fund any proposal in full or in part; any assignments of work by AM250-OH under the scope of this RFQ will be made dependent on need and the availability of adequate, specific funding.
- Not make an award at the end of the evaluation process; this RFQ is not to be interpreted or construed to guarantee that one or more proposing firms submitting responses will be awarded contracts.
- Adjust the RFQ Calendar of Event dates for whatever reason it deems appropriate.
- Contact the proposing firm to clarify any portion of the proposing firm’s submittal.

In accordance with federal and state statutes and AM250-OH policy, no person shall be excluded from participation or subject to discrimination in the RFQ process on the basis of race, color, age, sex, national origin, military status, religion, or disability.

Confidentiality of submittals -- submissions will remain confidential through the selection process. Once a contract is awarded, though, all RFP's will be considered public records.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

In the proposal evaluation phase, AM 250-OH staff and review committee will rate the proposals submitted in response to this RFQ based on the following criteria and weight assigned to each criterion. The following rubric will be used as an evaluator to determine the top three firms to be invited for an interview based on achieving the highest scores.

Proposal Criteria	Maximum Points	Scoring Rubric
Company History: Organization history, size of organization, years in business and years of relevant experience appear to have the necessary capacity and experience to meet the needs of America 250-Ohio.	6 points	1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (1 pt) 3 – Meets the criteria (3) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (5) 5 – Greatly exceeds (6)
Certifications: The proposing company has one of the certifications, i.e., Minority owned business, Women owned business or Military Veteran owned business	5 points	5 – points firm has one or more certifications 0 – firm does not have any certifications
Company Location: Office is based in the U.S. Office(s) based in Ohio Services to be provided by Ohio office(s)	If no, end the review process. 5 points	1 point for Office in Ohio 5 points for services to be provided by Ohio office
Proposed Account Team:	10 points	1 – Does not meet (0 points)

<p>The proposed account team appears to be well qualified, has recent and relevant experience and has more than one year of service with the firm.</p>		<p>2 – Somewhat meets (2) 3 – Meets the criteria (6) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (8) 5 – Greatly exceeds (10)</p>
<p>Prior Experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior work presented by the proposing firm answers all required prompts. • The prior work presented occurred with the past five years and is relevant/aligned with what AM250-OH is seeking. • One or more of the team who worked on the sample projects are part of the proposed account team. • Based on the examples of prior work presented, it creates a high degree of confidence that the proposed firm would be successful providing services related to AM250-OH. 	<p>20 points</p>	<p>1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (5) 3 – Meets the criteria (10) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (15) 5 – Greatly exceeds (20)</p>
<p>Approach:</p> <p>The proposed firm provided a well-thought-out statement about their approach to the projects to encourage success. The proposed approach seems like it would be effective, realistic and would work well within the constraints of the AM250-OH team and resources.</p>	<p>12 points</p>	<p>1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (2) 3 – Meets the criteria (4) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (8) 5 – Greatly exceeds (12)</p>
<p>Statement of Interest:</p> <p>The proposed firm provided a specific and compelling case for why they are suited for this work and why they would like to work with AM250-OH. It was realistic, specific, and enthusiastic.</p>	<p>12 points</p>	<p>1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (2) 3 – Meets the criteria (4) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (8) 5 – Greatly exceeds (12)</p>
<p>Fee Statement:</p> <p>Proposing fee provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A combined hourly rate for services • Provided an estimate to accomplish the various components included in the scope of work. • The hourly rate is +/- 10% of AM250-OH's expectation for hourly rates. • The estimate for the scope of services is +/- 10% of expectations for services. • The rates provided are competitive or favorable allowing AM250-OH to optimize the budget 	<p>20 points</p>	<p>1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (5) 3 – Meets the criteria (10) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (15) 5 – Greatly exceeds (20)</p>

<p>Submission Length:</p> <p>The submission's total pages were within the limit of 10 pages.</p>	<p>5 points</p>	<p>Yes -5 points Any pages over page 10 (single sided) or 5 (2 sided) will not be reviewed.</p>
<p>Overall Quality:</p> <p>The proposal was high quality, professional, and presented their case succinctly and effectively.</p>	<p>5 points</p>	<p>1 – Does not meet (0 points) 2 – Somewhat meets (2) 3 – Meets the criteria (3) 4 – Exceeds the criteria (4) 5 – Greatly exceeds (5)</p>