



RFP SAMPLE & TEMPLATE

Comprehensive
Direct Response



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RFP TEMPLATE

Comprehensive Direct Response

Template Background and Description:

This template is redacted from an RFP we received from an organization looking for a comprehensive direct response partner. In order to gather responses that would address the unique needs of its program, this organization provided detailed insights into the history of its direct response program. They also asked partners to provide recommendations for specific scenarios for partners the organization was hoping to address. You can also include specific areas of your direct response program such as sustainers, mid-level donor upgrade, and so on.



I. RFP INTRODUCTION AND GUIDELINES

A. Organizational Introduction and Background

From the beginning, you want to provide agencies with an overview of your organization—including various programs or divisions you’re looking to support through your direct response efforts. It’s also valuable to define the specific goals you’re hoping to achieve at the very beginning.

For example...

The direct response program goals for FY19 are to generate \$2.5M in revenue, acquire 8K new donors, and a 0–24 month donor base of 19K. This is a 15% YOY increase in revenue. The agency selected will be expected to hit the ground analyzing and understanding key performance metrics from donor and prospect segments from launch year and suggest ways to optimize FY19 budget to reach goals.

B. Immediate Direct Response Program History

In order to get accurate projections and meaningful recommendations from agencies, it’s important to provide as much detail about your current program efforts—including specific audience segments, tactics, metrics, and so on.



For example...

In FY19 our direct response team along with their agency mailed the following:

Acquisition:

- 1.6M cold acquisition pieces annually
- 22 campaigns across our various programs and target audiences

Cultivation/Renewal:

- 80K mail pieces to donors
- 7 annual campaigns with customization for each of the brands as appropriate
- 4 to 6 campaigns to mid-level donors
- An acknowledgment series for new donors

Alumni:

- 30K mail pieces to alumni (donors and prospects)
- 4 campaigns annually

In addition to direct mail, our direct response team along with the fundraising agency launched digital email, social media, and paid search campaigns. Digital campaigns were integrated with direct mail when appropriate.

C. File Size Composition

Providing information about the file size, including specific response rates for various programs, will help agencies better understand the current state of your program and identify new opportunities to include in their responses.

For example...

Our current donor file comprises 15,000 0–24 month donors that are available to mail for Annual Fund. The composition of the donor base includes 3,500 donors from the mid-level program and 2,000 newly acquired donors. These are the two most responsive audiences to direct mail appeals. The balance of donors has given to various restricted funds, special events, and peer-to-peer campaigns. Average gift from DM solicitation efforts has been \$70. Mid-level donor average gift is \$315.

Our direct response team and agency utilizes a [CRM NAME] system for annual giving program segmentation and selection. There are 675,000 records, primarily recent alumni, beneficiaries, and families, in the system that serve as a large warm prospect pool. Selection criteria to mail the large universe of prospective donor names has been refined and is continuing to be tested to improve response rates and performance.



D. Our Needs

In this section, you want to capture the specific objectives you're looking to accomplish from this new partnership.

For example...

We seek proposals that will leverage learnings from similar engagements, ensure that our development office is using annual giving best practices, and help the organization achieve its direct response program goals including:

- *Expanding, diversifying, and retaining the Annual Fund donor base*
- *Growing revenue and retaining donors through small- and medium-sized gifts from a large base*
- *Creating a pipeline of prospects for future large gifts and that demonstrate moves migration from Annual Fund to higher giving levels*
- *Generating a “groundswell” of support at all levels with the potential to engage and motivate the various constituents*

E. Required Agency Services

In this section, you want to capture the specific objectives you're looking to accomplish from this new partnership.

For example...

The agency awarded the contract will provide:

- *Development and management of all direct response campaigns including test planning and execution, copywriting and design services, production management and implementation services*
- *Innovation, advice, and counsel to the development staff on infrastructure needed to support the program*
- *Strategic planning, annual and multi-year forecasting and budgeting*



- *Implementation of an acknowledgment/stewardship program*
- *Program, file analysis and segmentation, and ongoing reporting and rigorous program assessment and optimization*
- *Strong account and creative services, analytics, and project and production management*

Our direct response program includes a diverse yet integrated suite of integrated fundraising strategies including: warm prospect acquisition and renewal using mail and digital techniques, mid-level and sustainer programs, telemarketing, acknowledgments, and cultivation.

F. Expectations on Working Together

Defining your expectations for the working relationship between your organization and agency partner on the front end is incredibly valuable—including meetings, reporting, system integration, and so on.

For example...

Ongoing meetings and touchpoints include:

- *Weekly production status meetings with direct response team*
- *Bi-monthly strategy/relationship status calls with sr. director*
- *Monthly reporting meetings with direct response team*
- *Monthly list planning meetings in coordination with acquisition specialist*
- *Periodic in-person creative and quarterly strategy review meetings will be required*

Once selected, the firm will be expected to work closely with internal and external partners supporting the direct response programs including but not limited to:

- *Organization Fundraising Analytics, Data Services, and Prospect Research & Management Team; data mining application and reporting tools utilized for file segmentation, file pulls and reporting*
- *Blackbaud Luminate online platform*



G. Evaluation Criteria

Providing insights into evaluation criteria is not only helpful for your team, it provides agencies with a framework to ensure their RFP provides information you need to make a confident decision.

For example...

Key criteria for evaluation of proposals include the following:

- *Demonstration of strong account management, and organizing a team structure that will allow for effective project management on a complex and expanding program*
- *Production and account management processes and procedures*
- *Administrative capacity to provide the services*
- *Providing effective strategy documents, schedules, creative briefs to keep team informed and that can be used to inform management*
- *Demonstrated ability to partner and collaborate with separate digital agency*

Additional criteria, not necessarily listed in order of importance, will be used for evaluation:

- *Your firm's approach and methodology*
- *Quality and relevance of the ideas presented in the proposal and in person*
- *Quality and relevance of the examples provided*
- *Firm and staff qualifications and experience*
- *Client references*
- *Projected costs*

H. Timeline & Contract Period

In this section, you want to provide a detailed timeline for response due dates, face-to-face interviews, candidate selection, contract negotiations, and agreement timeline. You should also define when the contract for services will start and conclude.



I. Questions & Answers

Define a process for agencies to request additional information or submit follow up questions that is manageable for your team.

For example...

Questions may be sent via e-mail to [EMAIL ADDRESS]. Or, questions may be asked via phone by calling [NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER]. Please provide a reference point in the RFP document for your question. Answers will be provided promptly.

II. ABOUT YOUR COMPANY & STAFFING

A. Organizational Chart, Team Structure, Bios, & Primary Point of Contact

Understanding how an agency is structured and who your team will be working with on a daily basis is important.

For example...

Please give a brief bio, including names, titles, and years of experience working in annual giving for the primary point of contact and three most senior individuals who will work day-to-day on the direct response services. For these same individuals, please describe his/her specific role on the account and the percentage of that person's time that will be allocated to our organization.



B. Current Clients & Industry Experience

You want to know the types of organizations that agency partners work with—especially if working with an agency with experience within your sector is a key criteria for your decision.

For example...

Please provide a list of similar organizations that you worked with in the past or currently work with and the type of work and services provided.



C. External Partners

Many agencies use freelancers or third-party partners to fulfill their services. Knowing this on the front end will help reduce any challenges or surprises as you start working together.

For example...

Your agency may propose providing the entire suite of required services with agency employees or you may utilize subcontractors for some of the services. You must outline what will be provided by employees vs. subcontractors.

For any external parties you intend to utilize on our organization's behalf, please describe how long you have been working together as partners, give an example of an existing account on which you partner and describe how the communication flows between you, the partner, and the client.

Please provide the following information on creative staff that will support the program:

- *Who writes your copy and who executes the design work on tests and new packages you would propose for our organization?*
- *Please give the credentials of these individuals if they are not in-house or are not part of the team you were asked to describe previously.*
- *Please describe your approach to developing the message/offer for mid-level programs.*

D. Client Communications Process

Knowing how an agency communicates with clients is critical to the relationship. Asking agencies to describe their client communication process, including examples will give you a good idea before you start working together.



III. DIRECT RESPONSE SAMPLES & STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Example of a Multi-Year Integrated Direct Response Strategic Plan

You want to have confidence that the agency's strategic approach and philosophy aligns with yours. Asking to see a sample of a multi-year direct response strategic plan will clarify that.

B. Campaign Reporting Samples

Measuring results and leveraging real-time data to enhance your program is imperative to the long-term success of your program. Making sure your agency has these capabilities and provides insights to your development team is key.

For example...

Please provide a set of standard reports you typically utilize to understand direct mail program dynamics and campaign performance. Additionally, please provide examples of reports you routinely provide clients that establish the objectives, strategies, and plan for a given mailing or digital campaign and the results of that mailing and digital campaign.

C. Approach to Creative & Testing

Every agency has their own approach to message development, creative, and testing. Making sure their approach aligns with your organization's needs, comfort levels, and processes will help mitigate roadblocks in the future.



For example...

The following information pertaining to message development:

- *Describe your approach and process for development and testing creative.*
- *Describe a few test ideas (include creative and universe expansion ideas) you have for us, based on what has worked for your similar clients in the past and what you know of our program.*
- *Provide a creative brief template your agency uses for new concepts.*

D. Approach to Digital (Social Media, SEO, and Paid Search)

In today's digital world, agencies should have a solid understanding of how digital integrates into direct response and elevates the success of your program.

For example...

Please provide an example of a digital strategic plan you have developed that integrates across channels. Include a description of the role you see for social media and paid search in the program and your agency's experience in the space.

E. Strategic Recommendations for Solving a Specific Problem

Having confidence that an agency can address your organization's unique challenges is a key outcome of this entire process. As a result, asking for strategic recommendations about a specific problem is one of the most valuable elements you can include in the RFP.



For example...

- *One of the key strategic program goals is to _____.*
- *Given the results to date shared from our program history, what would be your recommendation regarding the optimal mailing size and strategies for the annual giving program, and why?*
- *Our acquisition approach has focused on targeting various geographic regions with direct mail campaigns in our area. Provide thoughts on how you would approach geo-targeting and the impact it has on mail universe and opportunity to grow file size.*
- *In addition, there are 4,500 young alumni in the prospect database. What would be your recommendation for mailing volume and strategy for the alumni program?*

IV. DATA MINING / SEGMENTATION / REPORTING

A. Segmentation Approach & Example of Strategic Thinking

Data and strategic segmentation capabilities are critical to optimizing your direct response program and engaging donors with personal, relevant, and timely touches. This is a section where you can measure the segmentation capabilities and approach of each agency.

For example...

The agency will be responsible for providing annual giving numbers to the senior director and segmentation numbers to the relevant program managers for each effort. The plan is for list pulls to be implemented by our in-house data team. Please provide an example of a file segmentation that adequately reflects the sophistication of your approach.



B. Segmentation Management

Data management can be messy, especially when working with an outside agency. Understanding how an agency manages this process on the front end will ensure data doesn't become a barrier to your program's success.

For example...

Provide information about how you create and manage the segmentation matrix, appeal code assignment, oversight of merge/purge, and reconciliation of account data.

C. In-House Analytics Capabilities

Today, many agencies have an in-house analytics team. Asking an agency to highlight their experience and capabilities can help determine if they can support your organization's analytics needs.

V. PRICING

Pricing is often one of the most important criteria for decision-making. But it's also an area that can feel like you're not getting a completely accurate projection. In order to ensure your budget needs are met without your agency constantly going over-budget, it's important to clarify the specific breakdown you need and recognize potential changes during the negotiation process.



For example...

Please provide estimated costs for the services outlined in this RFP based on a draft direct mail program plan you submit with this RFP. Please provide as much detail as possible to describe the scope of the services included in the fee quoted. Break out your annual service fees for each area; include monthly amounts for costs where there are seasonal changes.

Include the following costs:

- *Account Management (including strategy, reporting, planning, budgeting, segmentation)*
- *Production Management*
- *Materials Estimate*
- *Copywriting*
- *Art/Design*

For creative costs, include an understanding of new concept costs vs. element testing on creative.

For production costs, include set-up fees for campaigns based on small volume (less than 10K volume) and larger volume campaigns.

Please provide your standard cost structure for digital creative fees separately.

Please explain how you plan to optimize cost efficiencies across our programs.

Please note that we understand that the final cost may vary from your estimate based on the contract negotiation process. We anticipate that the cost estimate you provide will enable us to gauge your costs relative to others.



VI. IDEAS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

This is your final chance to ensure the agency provides answers to any questions that might not have been answered in other parts of the response.

For example...

- *How can your agency make improvements to the bottom line?*
- *What is your experience managing multiple branded campaigns within an organization?*
- *What are your thoughts on optimization across the acquisition and multi-year donor universe?*
- *What are your thoughts on optimization of donor appeals to a donor base that have been acquired through varied sources (alumni, cold acquisition mail, peer-to-peer, special events)?*
- *What is your agency's experience with CRM and other fundraising platforms?*
- *What is your experience/philosophy in working collaboratively with multiple agencies, vendors, and complex organizations on a multi-channel program that result in optimal strategies and effective integrated campaigns?*



VII. REFERENCES

You want to ensure all of the information in the RFP is accurate and valid. Asking for specific references will help you connect with those who know what it's really like to work with the agency. Your reference request should help you get a wide range of feedback to support your specific program.

For example...

For two current and one past client, please provide contact information, number of years of the relationship, services provided, and a brief statement of the most significant advance or success in meeting this client's needs. One of the clients should be a current or recent client (within the last 12 months) where you have had an immediate impact. Please be sure that at least one of your references is an engagement where you coordinated strategy and implementation across channels utilizing internal and external partners. Also, one of the references should be from a nonprofit similar to our organization.

WANT TO USE THIS CONTENT IN YOUR NEXT DIRECT RESPONSE RFP?

WE HOPE THIS SAMPLE PROVIDED SOME NEW AND HELPFUL
IDEAS THAT WILL HELP YOU FIND THE RIGHT PARTNER.

If you'd like to utilize this framework or content in your next RFP, you can email Whitney Norman, Director of Client Solutions, at whitney.norman@pursuant.com for a free templated version of this sample.