Alliance College-Ready Public Schools
Request for Proposal

Marketing Firm to Brand the “new” Alliance, in light of its 20-year anniversary, supported by deep listening to the changing Los Angeles education environment.

Background:

Alliance College-Ready Public Schools was founded in 2004 based on the belief that all young people – regardless of ZIP code, income, ability, or background – are capable of achieving at high levels. Alliance is now one of the largest and most successful public charter school networks in the nation, operating 26 high-performing middle and high schools serving 13,000 scholars in Los Angeles communities that have been systematically oppressed. Alliance has a proven record of success: though 93% of incoming sixth graders come to Alliance reading below grade level, 95% of Alliance graduates have been accepted to college – including 73% to a four-year university. We strive to truly change the life trajectories of our scholars and communities.

We know that to truly create transformative change and best serve the communities we are a part of, Alliance must become an antiracist, pro-Black organization. In 2018, the organization began the long journey of looking internally to identify and dismantle white supremacist structures and practices that did not live up to Alliance’s values and larger mission. The murder of George Floyd and others in 2020 accelerated this focus and led the organization to officially name this as a key pillar of our organizational priorities going forward.

Along with our shift in focus and prioritization of becoming an anti-racist, pro-Black network, like most school systems in the country, Alliance transitioned into remote learning in the spring of the 2019-20 school year. In 2020-21, Alliance was fully remote, and then successfully navigated a safe and healthy return to in-person instruction to start the 2021-22 school year. The organization remains focused on transitioning from dealing with COVID-19 as a pandemic to managing it as an endemic, while at the same time implementing support to accelerate the learning of scholars due to COVID-19 learning loss.

From Surviving to Thriving:

In order to respond to the real-time conditions in the field throughout the pandemic, most of our strategic planning work in the last couple years has been short- to medium-term. As initial steps to reposition the organization, we have 5 network priorities this school year (2023-24), most of which were also priorities in 2021-22 and involve multi-year strands of work. We are also launching a long-term (3-year) strategic planning process, which will center our commitment to anti-racism and pro-Blackness, be sourced from our communities through deep stakeholder engagement, and build on current priorities and goals.

Looking ahead to next school year, September 2023 through June 2024, Alliance is seeking to lay a stronger foundation – and better prepare key stakeholders and partners (staff, educators, scholars, parents, the general public, etc.) – for a successful transition from an all-encompassing “surviving” posture to a reenergized focus on teaching, learning, and wellness in our school communities.

Part of this transition includes Alliance’s third ever CEO, Pablo Cesar Villavicencio who stepped into the role in January 2022. Pablo has dedicated his career to serving low-income communities, similar to the one he grew up in El Sereno in East Los Angeles. Like many of our scholars, he was the first in his family to graduate from
college. After earning his Bachelor’s degree from the University of California, Berkeley, Pablo spent the first 10 years of his educational career as a teacher and school administrator in the Bronx in New York City. He also served as a founding principal of a public school designed for recent immigrants and English Language Learners in New York City, and as a senior administrator in the Oakland Unified School District and the San Francisco Unified School District.

Alliance’s new CEO, our newly started 3-year strategic planning process, the move from COVID-19 as a pandemic to an endemic, and the beginning of a new school year in September 2023 in the even of Alliance’s 20-year anniversary (2024-25) come together to form a unique and powerful opportunity to recast the Alliance story to the general public, create excitement and interest among families pursuing educational options for their kids, and build broader and deeper relationships with communities across LA county.

**Campaign Components:**

The rebrand, public awareness, and community engagement campaign includes the following event, design, messaging, media production, and advertising components:

1. **A refreshed Alliance logo and tagline** that reflect the organization’s new “lean forward” vision to better support and serve our scholars and families, including the concept of “from Alliance College-Ready Public Schools to Alliance College-Ready Community Schools.” A sub-logo and tagline for Alliance to celebrate its upcoming 20-year anniversary the following school year (2024-25).

2. **A series of community design charrettes and major community conference** that brings together educators, scholars, families, researchers, policymakers, funders, and community stakeholders to help build out Alliance’s 3-year strategic plan and experience hands-on demonstrations of innovations in teaching, learning, and community partnerships based on the newly drafted strategic plan – a “community sourcing” approach to mapping out the future. *(The communication firm will not be involved in organizing the charrettes or conference, but will be asked to attend these events to collect insights and to possibly leverage them as marketing opportunities.)*

3. **A back-to-school/annual marketing campaign** that crystalizes our reimagined focus on teaching, learning, and community; builds awareness of Alliance’s work; and creates excitement, buy-in, and engagement among educators, scholars, families, and other targeted community partners.

4. **Deep listening – polling, surveying, analysis** that refreshes our understanding of who our “customer” or audience is across enrollment (students/families) and recruitment (staff) in a rapidly changing Los Angeles education environment.

   a. Public opinion polling and/or other tools to track stakeholder attitudes;
   b. Insights using demographic data or analytics of different zip codes across Los Angeles

**Scope of Work:**
The purpose of this RFP is to identify a communication firm to provide media strategy, artistic direction, and creative services to: 1) rebrand Alliance in a post-pandemic era that is more community centered and future-focused, 2) launch a year-long public awareness campaign that helps key education stakeholders, partners, and the general public balance the ongoing demands of COVID-19 with the important, strategic need
to re-energize and reimagine teaching, learning, and wellness for the 2024-25 school year and beyond, and 3) perform deep listening engagement that helps Alliance gain clarity on who its audiences are in 2024.

**Communication firm consulting includes:**

1. **Research.** Conduct market/audience research to develop Alliance’s new logo, tagline, the public awareness campaign message, and ad placement options that reflect our renewed focus on teaching, learning, community, and innovation. Market research should include both qualitative techniques such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and ethnography, as well as quantitative techniques such as stakeholder and partner surveys and analysis of secondary data. **Product(s): Research summary and analysis.**

   ○ **Additional research.** Attend and capture **charrette and conference experience** and conduct additional market research to inform final brand, messaging, and staging work.

2. **Branding.** Lead the development of Alliance’s new organizational brand development, as well as the brand for the back-to-school campaign, including outlining a brand strategy that is aligned with our campaign goals; help Alliance identify, leverage, and develop the needed tools to communicate the brand; and draft a plan to guide us on how to strengthen the newly developed brand. This work may also include an evaluation and rework of existing sub-brands. **Product(s): Name, logo, tagline, etc.; brand strategic plan.**

3. **Messaging.** Work with Alliance to identify and articulate how to best position and differentiate the organization’s new, community-based mission and the back-to-school/annual messaging campaign to highlight Alliance’s unique value proposition – in relationship to the interests of identified stakeholder groups and in response to competing messaging. **Product(s): Strategic messaging document, taglines, talking points, etc.**

4. **Staging.** Provide strategic counsel on how to best stage the campaign based on the concepts that come out of phases 1-3, with a start date of August 2024. In short, provide recommendations on when, where, how, and how much effort and resources should be allocated at different points in the campaign to create the best impact from advertisement placements. **Product(s): Media rollout and placement plan.**

5. **Adjustments.** Based on audience use, penetration, and attitudes, as well as other data provided to Alliance by vendors responsible for placing ads for the year-long back-to-school campaign, the communication firm will provide recommendations on needed adjustments to the campaign schedule, placements, etc. to ensure Alliance is effectively reaching and influencing our target audiences. **Product(s): Real-time strategic counsel and recommendations.**

**Project Timeline:**

**2023**
- **October** – Marketing firm selected
- **October-December** – Research phase

**2024**
- **January-February** – Branding phase
- **March-April** – Messaging phase
- **May** – Staging phase
- **August** – Conference, brand, and campaign launch
- **September-December** – Adjustments

To highlight the “Adjustment” work from September 2024 to December 2024, the marketing firm will be required to collaborate with Alliance on any midcourse modifications in an ongoing assessment of progress and success. The firm must demonstrate the willingness and capacity to adapt the media strategy and delivery platforms to meet the changing needs and priorities of the organization across the campaign year.

**Budget**

The total budget for this work, from October 2023 to December 2024, proposed by the vendor cannot exceed **$185,000**. Alliance will evaluate the firm’s submitted budget (total amount, what’s included, etc.) as an important criteria in the selection process.

**Required Qualifications:**

The marketing firm must:
- Have a current portfolio of work that demonstrates the ability to brand and message a product, project, and/or idea statewide or nationally;
- Have experience working with media campaigns at the $150,000 and above level; and
- Be able to hold meetings, conduct focus groups, etc. in person when deemed more beneficial than in a virtual setting.

**Preferred Qualifications:**

The firm would have:
- Leadership (both executive and creative) that reflects the racial diversity of Los Angeles and the targeted communities we are seeking to engage – namely Latinx and black/African-American;
- Experience providing communication, marketing, and/or media production support to the K-12 public education sector;
- Direct experience working with a charter school network, a major public school district, and/or the federal department of education;
- Experience developing and executing media campaigns targeting and working with Latinx and black/African-American communities; and/or
- Developed and/or led a media campaign to inform and influence public opinion on a significant issue facing the public.

**Submission Requirements:**

1. Provide a **narrative of no more than five pages** that describes your firm:
   a. Strategic approach to market research, brand and message development, and communication planning;
   b. Experience in market research, brand and message development, media product development, and communication planning; and
c. Process for evaluating the effectiveness of its communication campaigns and how it provides mid-course corrections if needed.

2. Provide **resumes** highlighting the qualifications of the principals and staff who will be engaged in this project on behalf of your firm.

3. Include **work samples and any other supporting evidence** (such as recognitions and awards), that illustrate your firm’s ability to successfully execute on this project.

4. Provide at **least two references**, with contact information, for previous clients who are able to speak to your work as it relates to the Scope of Work section in this RFP.

5. Provide a **line-item budget proposal** with an accompanying narrative, including a staffing plan to support this work.

**Submission and Review Process:**

- Submissions must be in PDF format and emailed to craguirre@laalliance.org by 5:00 pm PT on Friday, September 8, 2023.
- Alliance will announce the selected firm on Monday, October 2, 2023.