



## **Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR) Communications Strategy and Material Development, Phase 1 Request for Proposals**

STAR is requesting proposals from qualified vendors to provide communications development services that clearly communicate the messaging, branding and mission of STAR to meet the needs of a national scale program.

RFP Issued: October 20, 2023

Responses Due: October 31, 2023

Send proposals and any questions to STAR at [info@STARconservation.org](mailto:info@STARconservation.org).

### **About STAR**

STAR is a national, non-profit organization established to develop and expand the STAR framework for conservation practice evaluation, implementation, and valuation, to create a standardized approach for STAR initiatives across the US, and to provide guidance and support for new and existing state-level STAR Affiliates. The goal of STAR is to facilitate successful and sustained conservation practice adoption and implementation by farmers and ranchers at scale by providing state-level STAR Affiliates a comprehensive toolkit and tailored guidance to empower producer success and to connect them to incentive programs. The STAR framework provides an adaptable framework that seamlessly integrates with local and regional needs, capacity, and conservation priorities. Designed and led by producers, the STAR tool utilizes science and experience to target local solutions for local natural resource concerns, and to support farmers and ranchers on their conservation journey – wherever they are.

The STAR framework includes a simple, straightforward, and free tool developed by farmers and ranchers to increase voluntary conservation practice implementation on agricultural lands. The STAR 1 to 5 rating system is used to evaluate conservation practices on individual fields using a locally-driven, science-based approach to effectively and efficiently scale grassroots conservation efforts by incentivizing and rewarding the adoption of practices that have relevance to producers and their supply chain partners. The STAR tool can be used alone or as a complementary evaluation tool to support a variety of existing programs or as an easy on ramp to facilitate producer connections to a wide range of technical support and incentive programs.

STAR ([www.STARconservation.org](http://www.STARconservation.org)) is currently available through 77 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) across Illinois, four counties in IN, has been adopted by conservation district Affiliates in IA and MO, and is part of an enhanced soil health program in Colorado and a state soil health initiative in Washington. An expansion is underway for a variety of cropland and grazing production systems in the West (Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and New Mexico) and additional states in the Midwest over the next three years.

### **Background on Purpose and Current Communications Work**

The goal of this project is to develop and synthesize consistent communications language, strategies and branding for the national STAR organization, that also guides communications at the state-based



Affiliate level. In August, 2023, STAR developed a mission, vision and goals that have been reviewed and approved by our core stakeholders, including the STAR team, Illinois STAR team (where the STAR framework originated), other state STAR Affiliate staff, STAR board, and others, which will provide a strong foundation of communications materials and language to expand on.

The STAR communications language and branding will likely need to be modified to appeal to various STAR audiences, including farmers and ranchers (i.e. producers), partners and the general public, and we expect the tone, visuals, collateral materials, and messaging to be adapted for each audience, as necessary.

We envision the STAR communications needs being addressed in three ways: 1) Phase 1: build upon recently developed STAR communications language and provide a communications materials for STAR to utilize in its everyday business operations with funders, state STAR Affiliates, and the general public; 2) Phase 2: through collaboration with the STAR Communications Committee and state STAR Affiliate staff, expand upon Phase 1 communications deliverables to tailor communications tools and collaterals for STAR Affiliate use with state and regional partners, farmers and ranchers in their states, and local resources; and 3) Phase 1 and 2 general support: provide everyday communications support as necessary to develop quarterly press releases, deliver STAR Affiliate news to a national STAR audience, make website and social media updates weekly, and address other ad hoc communications needs. This RFP addresses Phase 1 needs only along with a ramp up of general STAR communications support. General support is expected to continue on an ongoing basis and into Phase 2.

### **Objectives & Deliverables**

The objectives of the STAR Communications Strategy and Materials Development Phase 1 RFP are to deliver communication to partners, state- level Affiliates, producers, and the general public in a way that allows them to connect and understand the value that STAR brings to them and their community, and inspires them to want to engage with STAR, wherever they are in their conservation journey.

The specific deliverables of this work include:

#### ***Phase 1 (November 2023 – February 2024)***

- Build upon currently approved communication language
  - Initiate and deliver next round of language development, including review of current materials
  - Standardize language that describes:
    - An Overview of STAR
    - Purpose of STAR Affiliates
    - How STAR works
    - Why STAR in your state
  - Develop a STAR communications guide that includes language, proper use of the logo, branding requirements, etc. for national STAR brand
- Review of current website communications, visuals
  - Website copy review and improvements
  - Periodically adding news items, blog posts, videos, language updates, pictures, graphics, etc. to the online presence of STAR



- Support national STAR Communications Committee with Affiliate representatives
  - Share standard materials and templates, STAR Communications Guide
  - Conduct an Affiliate needs and Affiliate capacity assessment
  - Coordinate national STAR communications with Affiliate and Partner communications staff
- Create videos / recorded webinars on topics like:
  - What is STAR?
  - Why engage with STAR?
  - How to get started (for Affiliates)
  - Producer recruitment

### ***General support (ongoing through end of the contract)***

- Manage social media accounts and update content regularly
  - LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.
- Develop templates for quarterly Press Releases and monthly MailChimp newsletters
- Develop annual report template
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### **Milestones**

*(November 2023 – February 2024)*

1. By January 15, 2023: Develop Communication Guide that describes the appropriate use of the STAR brand, key messages, key audiences/stakeholders, clear communication goals and strategies, and optimal communication audiences.
2. By January 15, 2023: Develop core communications materials (i.e. refined mission, vision, who is STAR, what does STAR do, how to get started, etc.) for national STAR, including refining messaging for producers, partners, funders and the general public.
3. By end of February 2024: Recommend an efficient communication schedule, including assigning expected communication responsibilities and duties for ongoing, general support.

### **Budget**

Approximately \$25,000

### **Proposal Requirements**

Please include the following in your proposal submission:

- Overview of your company, organizational capacity, team qualifications, references, and recent communications development examples
- Overview of how you will meet our objectives, to include:
  - Explanation of your proposed communications plans;
  - Outline of your communications development strategy and how you will meet our objectives;
  - Your strategy for mitigating, reducing, and managing risk, adjustments to scope, and changing priorities as the project evolves
  - Your protocol for maintaining alignment with national STAR team throughout the duration of the project
  - You are welcome to propose additional communications components not listed above for STAR's consideration



- Proposed timeline with activities and deliverables from contract execution to project completion. Please include an estimate of the number of hours your company can devote to this project weekly, from contract execution to project completion.
  - Please itemize the cost and hours associated with each of the three milestones listed above.
- Pricing with optional elements itemized.
- Estimate of annual fees to maintain core communications deliverables (i.e. newsletter development/sending, website updates, social media updates, etc.), including any third-party services needed
- Terms & conditions

Proposals should be submitted in electronic format using either Microsoft Word or PDF, with supporting pricing information in Microsoft Excel, to: [info@STARconservation.org](mailto:info@STARconservation.org).

#### **RFP & Project Timeline**

- RFP posting date: October 20, 2023
- Proposals due: October 31, 2023 @ 6:00 pm Eastern
- Proposal review: Week of October 30, 2023
- Interviews with qualified applicants: Week of November 6, 2023
- Review interview outcomes and select vendor: Week of November 13, 2023 (earlier if possible)
- Notify selected developer: No later than November 22, 2023 (earlier if possible)
- Project Kick-off: No later than November 27, 2023 (earlier if possible)