

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Link Bus Rapid Transit Creative Campaign Strategy & Concept Development

City of Rochester, Minnesota

Issue Date: October 2, 2026

Responses Due: October 21, 2026

1. Opportunity

The City of Rochester is seeking a creative marketing partner to help develop a compelling, memorable and sustainable creative campaign for **Link Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** as Rochester prepares for the anticipated launch of service in August 2027.

The City and its partners have developed an overarching marketing and public education framework that identifies campaign phases, priority audiences, education needs, communication channels and opportunities leading to opening. What we are looking for now is the creative idea that can bring that work to life.

We are looking for a partner that can help us answer questions such as:

- How do we make Link feel exciting, relevant and distinctly Rochester?
- How do we make people curious enough to learn more—and ultimately give Link a try?
- What is the memorable creative thread that can carry the campaign from “Link is coming” to “Link is here” and continue after launch?

The City is interested in creative that is polished, fun, approachable, energetic and memorable while remaining flexible enough to support practical rider education, safety information and the wide variety of people Link will serve.

This is not intended to be a traditional transit awareness campaign. We want a creative platform that people notice, remember and want to engage with.

2. About Link

Link is Rochester's new Bus Rapid Transit system and represents a significant investment in how people move through the community.

Rochester Public Transit (RPT) will operate Link as part of the City's public transit system. This connection provides an opportunity to build on RPT's existing presence in the community while also establishing Link as a distinct, highly visible new transit experience. Campaign materials should help audiences understand both what is new and different about Link and how it fits within Rochester's broader transit network.

Link will connect residents, employees, patients, visitors, businesses and destinations along one of Rochester's most active corridors. Its audiences are diverse and include current transit riders, people who may rarely or never use transit today, downtown residents and employees, businesses, motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and visitors to Rochester.

The Mayo Clinic is an especially important partner and generator of trips along the corridor. The campaign must be able to connect with Mayo Clinic employees as well as patients, companions and visitors who may be navigating Rochester for the first time.

Link will also include 12 stations with unique enhancements that reflect the places and communities along the route, creating opportunities for storytelling and community connection.

The City's working marketing and public education plan anticipates five broad campaign phases:

Link Is Coming → Get Excited → Get Ready for Link → Link Is Here

The selected creative approach should be able to evolve across these phases, which could be cyclical, rather than function as a single launch advertisement or short-term campaign.

3. What We Are Seeking

The City is seeking a partner with demonstrated strength in **creative strategy, campaign development, messaging and brand storytelling**.

We are particularly interested in firms that can take a complicated subject or desired behavior and turn it into something people can quickly understand, relate to and remember.



We want the selected firm to challenge us, bring outside perspective and help identify the creative opportunity that we may not see ourselves.

4. Potential Scope of Work

The exact scope will be developed collaboratively with the selected partner. We anticipate that the work may include:

Discovery and Creative Strategy

- Review existing Link branding, research, project information and the City's marketing/public education framework.
- Facilitate discovery with City staff and key project partners.
- Understand priority audiences, motivations, barriers and opportunities.
- Help identify the strongest efficiency and practical reasons for people to engage with and ultimately ride Link.
- Recommend the overarching creative strategy and positioning.

Creative Campaign Development

- Develop a central creative concept or campaign platform that can carry Link through pre-launch, opening and sustained service.
- Develop potential campaign language, messaging, calls to action and/or thematic elements.
- Establish an appropriate voice and personality for community-facing Link communications, that are reflective of the Link brand and also integrate with RPT.
- Demonstrate how the idea can flex between excitement/awareness messaging and practical rider education.
- Consider how the concept connects with distinct audiences without creating disconnected campaigns for each audience.

Creative Direction

- Establish visual and verbal creative direction that complements the existing Link identity.
- Demonstrate how the creative platform could translate across several representative applications, including, but not limited to:
 - digital and social media;
 - video;
 - outdoor advertising;
 - buses and stations;



- community events and activations;
- partner communications;
- employee and employer communications;
- rider education;
- promotional items or other unexpected applications.

The City is not necessarily seeking production of all these elements through this initial engagement. Representative applications should help establish how the idea works across channels and can be used, adapted, and applied by various contributors in the future.

Campaign Playbook / Long-Term Use

- Develop a practical creative framework or playbook that City teammates and project partners can continue to use.
- Identify guardrails for how the campaign should—and should not—be applied.
- Recommend how the creative concept should evolve from awareness and anticipation to education, launch and ongoing ridership.
- Identify opportunities for future extensions, activations or refreshes without requiring the City to reinvent the campaign after opening.

Implementation Recommendations

- Provide recommendations for translating the creative platform into a phased campaign through August 2027 and the initial months of service.
- Identify which creative investments are most important to campaign success.
- Identify opportunities where additional agency production or support may add value.

5. What Success Looks Like

We are less interested in receiving a traditional transit campaign than we are in creating something that gives Rochester a reason to pay attention.

The strongest creative direction will:

- Strong collaboration with the City Communication team and RPT to ensure branding is maintained throughout the thoughtful process of creation.
- Deliver on education with what BAT lanes are and how to have safe boarding and departures
- Make Link feel approachable and easy to understand.
- Generate curiosity and excitement before service begins.



- Encourage people who do not currently ride transit to consider trying Link.
- Work for both everyday local riders and people experiencing Rochester for the first time.
- Be flexible enough to support education and safety messaging without losing its personality.
- Recognize the importance of major partners and audiences.
- Reflect Rochester without relying on clichés.
- Be distinctive enough that the community begins to recognize the campaign without needing to see a lengthy explanation.
- Ensure that it is clear that Link is for everyone.
- Work across paid, earned, owned, partner and physical environments.
- Continue to have value after the initial excitement of opening.
- Give City staff and partners a creative system they can realistically sustain.

6. Desired Partner

We are interested in partners who:

- Demonstrate strong conceptual and strategic thinking.
- Have a portfolio of polished, creative and memorable work.
- Can show examples where a creative idea helped simplify a complex message or influence behavior.
- Understand how a central campaign idea can extend across multiple platforms and audiences.
- Are comfortable collaborating with a public-sector organization and multiple community partners.
- Can balance creativity with accessibility, inclusiveness and practical public information.
- Are willing to push our thinking while working collaboratively with the project team.
- Can develop a creative system that others can successfully use and extend.

Experience specifically in transit or government communications is not required. Relevant experience may come from tourism, transportation, consumer brands, behavior-change campaigns, community initiatives or other work where strong creative strategy drove engagement. An awareness and familiarity with the Rochester, MN community would be beneficial.



7. Qualifications Response

We want to make this process straightforward. Responses should be concise and should provide enough information for us to understand your team, your thinking and the quality of your work.

Please provide:

1. About Your Firm

A brief introduction to your firm and the type of work you believe you do especially well.

2. Relevant Experience

Up to three examples of work that demonstrate your ability to develop memorable creative campaigns or platforms. Tell us briefly:

- a. What was the challenge?
- b. What was your creative/strategic role?
- c. What did you develop?
- d. What happened as a result?

3. Your Perspective on This Opportunity

Based on the information provided, briefly describe how you would approach the Link creative strategy engagement and what you believe will be important to getting it right.

4. Project Team

Identify the people who would work with us and their anticipated roles.

5. Approach and Anticipated Deliverables

Describe the process you would recommend for moving from discovery to an approved creative platform and usable campaign framework.

6. Anticipated Investment

The City has intentionally not established a prescribed budget for this engagement. We are interested in understanding what firms believe is an appropriate level of investment to accomplish this work well.

Please provide:



- a. an anticipated fee or fee range for the core creative strategy and campaign-development engagement;
- b. what you assume would be included at that level;
- c. any recommended optional services or subsequent phases and their approximate costs; and
- d. any factors that could materially affect cost.

The City recognizes that a final scope and fee may need to be refined collaboratively with the selected firm.

7. References

Provide contact information for two clients familiar with comparable work.

Please limit responses to approximately 6–8 pages, excluding work samples.

We are not requesting speculative creative concepts, campaign names, taglines or finished designs as part of the qualifications process. We want to understand how you think and what you have accomplished for others. Creative development for Link will occur with the selected partner.

8. Selection

Responses will be evaluated based primarily on:

- Quality and relevance of previous creative work.
- Demonstrated strength in creative strategy and conceptual development.
- Understanding of the Link opportunity and its varied audiences.
- Proposed approach to collaboration and campaign development.
- Experience and capabilities of the proposed team.
- Ability to create a flexible, sustainable creative platform.

The City may invite a limited number of firms to participate in a conversation or interview before making a final selection. If selected, on either 10/28, 10/29 or 10/30. The City reserves the right to reject any or all responses and to elect not to proceed with a selection or contract award of this RFQ.

Following selection, the City intends to work with the preferred firm to finalize the scope, deliverables, schedule and fee.



9. Project Timing

The City anticipates selecting a creative partner in November 4, 2026. Initial creative strategy and campaign development should occur early enough to influence community-facing Link communications well in advance of the anticipated **August 2027 opening**.

The creative platform should be designed with that full timeline in mind, including the transition from pre-opening awareness and excitement to rider education, launch and sustained ridership.

10. Background Materials

The City will provide the selected firm with relevant background materials, including:

- Link BRT Marketing & Public Education Plan;
- existing Link brand standards and creative assets;
- route, station and project information;
- available audience/research information;
- public education and safety requirements;
- information regarding station enhancements;
- relevant partner and stakeholder information; and
- other existing communications and marketing materials.

11. Compliance Goals

This engagement is subject to the City of Rochester's Professional Services Compliance Requirements, including a 19.51% Targeted Business participation goal and workforce participation goals of 15% people of color and 9% women. Proposers are responsible for reviewing and meeting all applicable compliance requirements, including required forms and documentation; if the Targeted Business participation goal cannot be met, proposers must document Good Faith Efforts and submit the applicable waiver/reduction request.

12. Submission

Please submit qualifications electronically to: **Jenna Bowman, Strategic Communications & Engagement Director**, jbowman@rochestermn.gov

Responses are due by **11:59 p.m. on October 21, 2026**

Questions may be submitted to **Jenna Bowman** at jbowman@rochestermn.gov by **10/16**

