

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Marketing & Communications Consultant

Ascent Classical Academy Charter Schools

RFP Issued: August 7, 2026
Proposals Due: August 31, 2026, 5:00 PM MT
Point of Contact: Christopher Scott, Chief Financial Officer
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1. Introduction

Ascent Classical Academy Charter Schools (“Ascent” or “the Network”) is soliciting proposals from qualified marketing and communications consultants or firms to develop an integrated marketing strategy in support of the Network’s enrollment, fundraising, and growth objectives, and to serve as a resource to the Network’s leadership team as they execute the strategy

We are looking for a partner — whether an individual consultant, a fractional CMO, or a full-service agency — who can operate at the strategic and executional level that a four-school network requires, and who can act as a genuine thought partner to an all-volunteer board.

2. Organization Background

Ascent Classical Academy Charter Schools is a network of tuition-free classical public charter schools in Colorado, enrolling more than 2,700 students in kindergarten through grade 12 across four campuses. The Network was founded by parents and educators associated with Golden View Classical Academy, the first Colorado school affiliated with Hillsdale College’s Barney Charter School Initiative, and Ascent schools have since become Candidate Member Schools of Hillsdale College’s K–12 Education Office, which provides curriculum resources and training on governance, leadership, instruction, and school culture.

The Network’s four campuses are:

Campus	Location	Region
Ascent Classical Academy of Douglas County	Lone Tree, CO	Front Range
Ascent Classical Academy of Northern Colorado	Windsor, CO	Front Range
Ascent Classical Academy of Northern Denver	Brighton/Thornton, CO	Front Range
Ascent Classical Academy of Grand Junction	Grand Junction, CO	Western Slope

Ascent schools deliver a content-rich classical liberal arts curriculum grounded in virtue, wisdom, and the Western intellectual tradition — an approach that is well differentiated in the Colorado charter market but not always well understood by parents evaluating school options.

3. Current Marketing Capacity & Why We Need Help

Ascent currently has no in-house marketing staff at the Network level. Marketing oversight is provided on a volunteer basis by a board member who chairs the Finance and Marketing subcommittees — an unpaid role that is not intended to function as a full-time marketing department, even though the workload at times resembles one. A consultant is currently contracted month-to-month, performing marketing functions for the network and the local campuses. The scope under which that consultant was contracted was established in 2024, and this RFP expands that scope.

The Network has a paid Network Development Director responsible for fundraising strategy across the Network, and some individual campuses have their own local development directors and marketing/community engagement staff. None of these roles are dedicated marketing functions, and none have the bandwidth or specialized expertise to build and execute a multichannel marketing program across four campuses.

Each campus has an existing website; these need a refresh rather than a rebuild. Some common marketing collateral exists across the Network today but is inconsistent and not grounded in tested messaging.

4. Scope of Work

The consultant will be responsible for helping Ascent achieve three goals, operating across the following timeframes:

4.1 Short-Term Goal: Enrollment & Retention

Build sufficient awareness and interest in each campus that every grade at every school maintains a waiting list. This is the Network's most immediate priority.

4.2 Medium-Term Goal: Fundraising Support

Support the Network Development Director in generating increased local fundraising at each campus (in coordination with local development directors where they exist) and in securing more major gifts at the Network level.

4.3 Long-Term Goal: Network Growth

Support the Network's growth through the opening of additional schools, by building the brand awareness, reputation, and community demand that make new-campus launches viable.

4.4 Specific Workstreams

Across all three goals, we expect the engagement to include the following workstreams. Respondents should propose the specific tactics, sequencing, and staffing they believe best achieve our goals; the items below describe the scope, not a prescribed methodology.

A. Market Research

- **Local market analysis:** demographics, school-choice competition, and enrollment dynamics specific to each of the four campus communities (three Front Range, one Grand Junction/Western Slope).
- **Parent-choice research:** deepen our understanding of what drives parent decision-making across school types generally and for classical charter schools specifically. Ascent already has a substantial body of research on this topic, which will be shared with the selected consultant; we are looking for the consultant to build on it, not start from zero.
- **Donor research:** as relevant, insight into what drives giving decisions among local and major donors to classical education and charter schools in our markets.

B. Message Development

- **Core messaging:** translate research into key messages that build awareness of classical education and clearly differentiate Ascent from other charter, district, and private options — and articulate the unique benefits it provides to students and families.
- **Audience-specific adaptation:** tailor core messages for prospective parents, current families (retention), local donors, major donors, and community/civic stakeholders relevant to future school openings.

C. Multichannel Communications Plan

- **Collateral:** development of and refresh plan for physical and digital marketing materials, standardized across the Network with defined room for local campus customization.
- **Social media:** a social media strategy and execution plan, including organic content and paid social advertising.
- **Paid and earned media:** a plan for paid advertising and public relations / earned media to build awareness in each market.
- **Websites:** refresh and ongoing maintenance of the Network website and each campus website (existing sites do not need to be rebuilt from scratch).

5. Marketing-to-Enrollment and Marketing-to-Giving Handoff

Our marketing goals are to build awareness and generate interest — not to close enrollments or gifts directly. Once a prospective parent or donor takes action (e.g., requesting a tour, applying, or expressing interest in giving), responsibility for closing — enrolling the student or securing the gift — belongs to the relevant school’s admissions/enrollment process or to the Network/local development director’s fundraising process.

Proposals should reflect a clear model for this handoff: how the consultant will generate and qualify interest, how leads will be tracked and passed to school or development staff, and how the consultant will measure success on the awareness/interest side of the funnel.

6. Proposal Requirements

Please structure your proposal with the following sections. We are open to proposals from full-service marketing agencies, independent consultants, and fractional CMO providers — individually or as a team — and welcome you to present your qualifications and approach in whatever format you consider best practice, provided it addresses each item below.

- **Firm/consultant overview:** background, size, structure, and relevant experience, with particular interest in experience with K–12 schools, charter networks, nonprofit fundraising communications, or values-based/classical education organizations.
- **Relevant case studies:** 2–4 examples of comparable work, including measurable outcomes (enrollment growth, waitlist creation, fundraising results, etc.).
- **References:** at least three client references, ideally including at least one multi-site school or nonprofit network.
- **Proposed approach and project plan:** your proposed methodology, sequencing, and timeline across the workstreams in Section 4, including which elements you would prioritize in year one.
- **Deliverables:** a specific list of deliverables tied to the project plan (e.g., research reports, message frameworks, brand/collateral standards, channel plans, website refresh scope, reporting cadence).
- **Team and staffing:** who will work on the account, their roles, and their relevant experience.
- **Measurement plan:** how you will track progress against our three goals (waitlists, local and major gift fundraising support, and growth-readiness), including the marketing-to-handoff model described in Section 5.
- **Proposed fee structure:** see Section 7.

7. Proposed Fee Structure

Ascent does not have a predetermined budget or fee structure for this engagement. Please propose the fee structure you believe best fits the scope of work — for example, a monthly or annual retainer, project/phase-based fees, hourly rates, or a hybrid model — along with:

- Total estimated cost for year one, broken out by workstream or phase where possible.
- Any costs that would be pass-through (media spend, PR placement, printing, website hosting/development platforms, etc.) versus consultant fees.
- Payment terms and invoicing cadence.
- Any assumptions or dependencies that affect pricing (e.g., level of internal support needed from Ascent, access to existing research and brand assets).

8. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by the Board’s Finance and Marketing subcommittees on the following factors:

- **Relevant experience:** demonstrated success with school choice, nonprofit, or multi-site enrollment and fundraising marketing.
- **Strategic quality:** the strength and clarity of the proposed research, messaging, and channel approach, and its fit with a classical education mission.
- **Capacity and capability:** evidence the consultant/firm can operate at the sophistication and scale a four-campus network requires.
- **Value:** cost relative to scope and expected impact, not lowest price alone.
- **Fit:** ability to work effectively with an all-volunteer board and lean development and marketing staff, and to communicate clearly with non-marketing-specialists point of contacts.

9. Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFP issued	August 7, 2026
Deadline for written questions	August 13, 2026
Answers to questions distributed to all respondents	August 20, 2026
Proposals due	August 31, 2026, 5:00 PM MT
Finalist interviews (virtual or in-person)	Week of September 14, 2026
Consultant selected and notified	By September 25, 2026
Engagement begins	October 1, 2026 (target)

Ascent reserves the right to adjust this timeline as needed and will notify all respondents of any changes.

10. Submission Instructions

Please submit questions proposals electronically (PDF preferred) no later than August 31, 2026, 5:00 PM MT to:

Christopher Scott — Chief Financial Officer

christopher.scott@ascentcolorado.org

Written questions may be submitted at any time before August 13, 2026. Questions and answers will be shared with all respondents to ensure a fair process.

11. General Terms & Conditions

- This RFP does not commit Ascent Classical Academy Charter Schools to award a contract, pay any costs incurred in preparing a proposal, or procure or contract for services.
- Ascent reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, to negotiate with any respondent, and to waive minor irregularities in proposals received.
- Ascent reserves the right to request additional information or clarification from any respondent, or to request a presentation/interview prior to final selection.
- All information submitted in response to this RFP will be treated as confidential to the extent permitted by law and used solely for evaluation purposes.
- Any resulting engagement will be subject to a mutually agreed written contract, including scope, fees, term, and termination provisions.