

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS BRANDING

*Establishing Competitive Positions for Manistee County*



11 Cypress Street Manistee, Michigan 49660

231-723-4325

[www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com](http://www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com)

**Table of Contents**

- I. Summary ..... 3
- II. Project Objectives..... 3
- III. Project Background and Need..... 4
  - Background: A County Unified Around Visions..... 4
  - Prosperity: The Economic Development Vision for Manistee County..... 5
  - The City of Manistee: Seeking to Become the Community of Choice..... 5
  - The Manistee County Chamber: A New Strategy for New Times ..... 6
  - Manistee County: the Facts Support the Need..... 6
- IV. What is the Project?..... 7
- V. Project Steps ..... 8
  - Branding Learning Community ..... 8
  - Discovery ..... 8
  - Brand Positioning..... 9
  - Brand Outreach..... 10
  - Brand Implementation - Marketing ..... 10
  - Mentoring..... 11
- VI. Expected Results ..... 11
- VII. Submission Requirements ..... 12
  - Introduction to Managing Organization ..... 12
  - Project Team ..... 13
  - Project Experience ..... 13
  - Project Management..... 13
  - Project Description ..... 13
- VIII. Selection Process ..... 14
- IX. Cancellation of RFP ..... 15
- X. Other..... 15
- XI. Questions ..... 15

## **I. Summary**

This is a Request for Proposals (RFP) from qualified organizations to facilitate, manage, and complete an initiative to develop, market, and test a brand identity for Manistee County that will enable Manistee County to more effectively compete as a destination of choice for industries, businesses, tourists, and residents. This initiative is funded in part under a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to the Manistee Chamber of Commerce. The Manistee-based Alliance for Economic Success is managing and administering the project and grant under an agreement with the Chamber of Commerce.

## **II. Project Objectives**

As reflected in the grant request to the USDA, the project seeks to answer several questions that are significant to the economic well-being and quality of life in Manistee County, including:

- How shall Manistee County be presented to companies that could provide substantial new business and job opportunities to Manistee County?
- Why should businesses, industries or families invest in Manistee County rather than elsewhere?
- Why should tourists from other states or countries consider Manistee County a destination?
- What are the features and qualities that make Manistee County unique?
- How does Manistee County compare with its competition? Who are the competitors?
- What are the themes for Manistee County that can be utilized by businesses, communities, schools and others to help them effectively market themselves?
- How can branding for Manistee County be leveraged by the City of Manistee, Onkama, Arcadia, Copemish, Wellston, townships, and surrounding communities?
- How can the return on investment of public and private marketing funds be maximized by the County's brand identity and a clearly defined market?
- How can a branding initiative be used to direct and sustain the visions for the future?

These and related questions have been formulated during recent community-driven initiatives that have recommended this branding project as a high county-wide priority, as referenced by Envision Manistee County, the Economic Development Strategy for the Alliance for Economic Success, the Strategic Plan for the City of Manistee, and the Strategic Plan for the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce. There are several documents related to these initiatives that may be reviewed by respondents to this RFP by going to [www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com](http://www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com)

### **III. Project Background and Need**

The need for this project has its origin in a series of events and initiatives that have occurred since 2005, all of which illustrate why a branding effort and a cohesive marketing plan built around branding are essential for Manistee County. This extensive background information is offered in this RFP for two reasons: (1) the respondent can develop a high quality proposal that specifically focuses on Manistee County's needs and (2) to provide the respondent background knowledge regarding facts, information sources, and prior initiatives that may be of cost-containment value while implementing this project.

In 2005, Manistee County was on the heels of an intensive debate over a proposal to site a coal-fired power generating plant on Manistee Lake. The debate was heated and contentious and, in a sense, mobilized people in and around Manistee County like they had never been mobilized before. Out of that public debate, came a shared recognition of immeasurable benefit to this rural, economically-challenged Michigan County on the shores of Lake Michigan; unless the community crafted a comprehensive cohesive plan for the future, individuals from elsewhere would clearly chart the course and the community at large may not be pleased with the results.

#### **Background: A County Unified Around Visions**

In 2005, the Manistee County Community Foundation, one of 65 community foundations in Michigan, began a landmark momentous county-wide visioning initiative titled "Envision Manistee County" that began the conversation to establish a vision for Manistee County. The visioning effort was a significant undertaking for a County with 25,000 people and no prior experience with community-driven visioning processes. The endeavor was managed by a steering committee that reflected all interests: manufacturing, medical care, education, municipal government, nonprofit organizations, and the business community. A total of 12 citizen volunteers co-chaired six work groups that developed visions, strategies and action plans for the following areas of focus: economy and employment, youth and education, government and infrastructure, health and human services, arts and culture, and natural resources and recreation.

The process proved to be nearly as valuable as the results as it involved over 700 people during a 16 month period that culminated in the presentation and release of a report, **Envision Manistee County**, to a packed house at Manistee's historic Ramsdell Theatre in May 2006. The report included two, statistically valid surveys; one of the general population and another of the county's high school students. Out of the 600 high school students that were approached, 500 voluntarily completed the four page survey. This phenomenon sent a strong signal; young people of Manistee County want and expect a voice in shaping the economic, political, and

social future of the county in which they live. Out of this process also emerged a set of priorities for the future. Among these priorities, one major priority was recommended by the Economy and Employment Work Group and ratified by the Envision Steering Committee: “Secure resources to support a county-wide, inclusive, professionally managed process to develop brand identities for Manistee County.”

## **Prosperity: The Economic Development Vision for Manistee County**

Envision Manistee County’s recommendation to re-energize the county’s Economic Development Office, paved the way for a six month, community-driven process that involved 43 meetings with county and regional stakeholders and included a third-party best practice analysis by Public Sector Consultants; the Alliance for Economic Success emerged spearheading a new, forward-thinking economic development plan for Manistee County.

The Economic Development Plan elicits strategies that focus on the following: building capacity; retaining, expanding and attracting jobs and business; and bringing new resources to the county — all with a vision of “Prosperity” and measurably improving the economic well-being and quality of life in Manistee County. Based upon the focus group meetings that preceded the formation of the Alliance for Economic Success and the best practices analysis by Public Sector Consultants, Manistee County’s economic development strategy concurs that:

“Manistee County is recognized as a county that is in a transition of positive change. Development interest in the county is increasing. Effective marketing of the county is a complex process. It must involve a clear understanding of the county’s strengths and weaknesses, the realistic targets for business attraction, and the factors that may persuade those targets to consider the county.”

“To be effective, all organizations and individuals involved with economic development must be on the same page and be part of a team approach to cultivate new business for the county. “

“Accordingly the Alliance for Economic Success will support and participate in a program to effectively brand Manistee County as a critical step toward outcome-based marketing. This must be a highly focused, professionally-managed effort that will consider all elements of the county and the factors that enable us to differentiate and legitimately claim a competitive advantage.”

## **The City of Manistee: Seeking to Become the Community of Choice**

In 2007, the City Council of Manistee developed its first-ever three year strategic plan. In 2008, the City Council updated that strategy front-ended by community input that focused on the needs, direction and priorities for Manistee County’s only city. The City Council, with input from the community and the city department directors, has established the vision for the city: “Manistee will be the community of choice on the northwest Michigan coastline with a strong, diversified economy, providing opportunities for all...a city whose prosperity continues into the future.” The City’s strategic plan sets forth seven strategic priorities, one of which is titled “Competitive Position of the City.” To achieve this strategic priority, the City Council and its department directors established a goal followed by an objective:

“To competitively position the City of Manistee as the community of choice and destination for businesses, industry, tourists and families. This will be done by implementing a forward-looking plan built around branding and the unique selling features of Manistee, developed in partnership with stakeholders and the support of branding and marketing expertise.”

“Branding and Marketing – In 2008, we will support funding for and fully participate in a collaborative process led by the Chamber of Commerce to develop unifying brand identities and marketing themes for Manistee County that will provide a baseline for future branding and marketing of the City within the overarching brands of the County.”

## **The Manistee County Chamber: A New Strategy for New Times**

Late in 2007, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce updated its strategic plan to reflect the needs of its current and future members and to support the long-term viability and vitality of Manistee County. The process included open forums that invited input and participation from over 200 groups and individuals as well as an independent third-party organizational assessment and best practices analysis. The new Chamber of Commerce strategy focused on education, training, marketing, promotion, communications, advocacy, and a variety of additional member services.

The strategic plan, covering the 2008-2011 period, has one goal for marketing: “By 2008, secure funding and serve as the catalyst to complete a comprehensive branding program for Manistee County that will help competitively position Chamber of Commerce members and the county.” The plan further establishes that the branding effort must, “Invite the leadership, participation and contributions of all interests in developing the program, including the Alliance for Economic Success, Visitors and Convention Bureau, all business interests, local units of government and others.” The strategic plan also indicates that the branding initiative will, “Provide a focus for allocating public and private resources to promote and advertise Manistee County and all of its distinct qualities and components so that the Chamber of Commerce members and the county as a whole are competitively positioned to prosper.”

## **Manistee County: the Facts Support the Need**

The current economic conditions in Manistee County support the need for the project as communicated in part by the surveys administered through the Envision Manistee County initiative and serve as the basis for the County-wide priority that this project has received:

- 56% of the respondents indicated that the future health of Manistee County is below average or poor
- 67% indicated that Manistee County is not able to provide sustainable employment opportunities that offer a living wage

- 60% do not indicated that youth under the age of 18 have employment opportunities
- The average payroll per employee in Manistee County is 93% of the Northwest Michigan (10 county area) value and 72% of Michigan's
- The total number of business establishments and employees in Manistee county have grown at a slower rate than that of Northwest Lower Michigan
- From 1998 to 2002, goods producing industries in Manistee County experienced a 12.6% decrease in employment
- Per capita personal income in Manistee County is 75 percent of the state average and 72 percent of the national average
- In 2002, Manistee County's total personal income was 57<sup>th</sup> in the state, accounting for .2 percent of the state total
- Median family income in Manistee County is 78% of the state value and 83% of the nation's value
- Manistee County's median income is less that the median income of the 10 county Northwest Michigan region
- Since 1994, unemployment in Manistee County has been higher than that of Northwest Michigan and the nation.

#### **IV. What is the Project?**

The primary goal of *"Branding: Establishing Competitive Positions for Manistee County"* is to create a cohesive foundation through brand identity development and positioning that supports development efforts to effectively and efficiently market Manistee County to industries, businesses, tourists and residents in support of the economic well-being and quality of life within Manistee County.

Through collaboration and partnership, the process will be administered and managed by the Alliance for Economic Success (AES) under an agreement with the grantee, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce will maintain a vital partnership role in many key elements of the project.

It is emphasized that respondents are free to propose steps and an action plan that will best respond to the goals and objectives of the project. Respondents should take into consideration the support provided by AES as well as other opportunities for using local capacities and volunteerism to 1) build local capacities as an important outcome of the project, 2) make use of

local resources that can effectively inform the contractor about local conditions and 3) contain costs to carry out the project.

## V. Project Steps

### Branding Learning Community

At the outset of the project, the AES will coordinate with the contractor to form a Branding Learning Community consisting of diverse representation which may include but is not limited to:

Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce Alliance for Economic Success	Bear Lake Promoters
Manistee Convention and Visitors Bureau	Wellston Boosters
Little River Band of Ottawa Indians	Manistee County Sport Fishing Association
City of Manistee	Manistee Intermediate School District
Manistee County	Local School Districts
Manistee Townships and Township Association	Students
West Shore Community College	Manistee County Community Foundation
West Shore Medical Center	Northwest Michigan Council of Governments
Manistee Manufacturer's Council	Portage Lake Association
Manistee Downtown Development Authority	MSU-E Cooperative Extension Service
Filer Township Downtown Development Authority	Small Business Training and Development Center
	Large to Small Businesses

The purposes and functions of this group will be to:

- Foster an integrated learning experience for key Manistee County sectors about branding and marketing
- Involve key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the project
- Steer the overall project
- Participate in the mentoring and implementation phases of the project as well as the continuous improvement and ongoing implementation.
- Lead in recognizing and promoting successes that result from the initiative.

The AES will provide staff support to coordinate the activities of the group in conjunction with the consultant selected through this RFP process.

### Discovery

The Discovery Phase will include the following:

- **Brand Audit.** An assessment of the unique qualities, characteristics, differences, strengths and weaknesses of Manistee County.
- **Competitive Analysis.** An audit of “competitors” to determine their positions, personality and imagery. This will provide a point of departure for delineating points of differentiation for Manistee County.
- **Internal and External Surveys.** Stakeholders from the county and outside the county will be interviewed to gather evidence about the differentiating qualities of Manistee County. The survey work will also include testing brands, brand assumptions and related imagery during the later phases of the project. As part of this initiative, feedback will be obtained by the AES from the community for the purpose of updating “Envision Manistee County.”
- **Identifying Audiences.** A prioritized list of who needs to be reached or targeted (marketing) will be created by the AES. This will identify decision makers and individuals with influence. Importantly, this step will also identify audiences that are beyond the scope of the endeavor.

Staff of the AES and the Chamber of Commerce will serve as expert resources to guide the project in collaboration with the consultant including but not limited to coordinating stakeholder meetings, administering surveys and assisting with competitor definitions. A project currently underway to develop an economic development plan for lands surrounding Manistee Lake identifies competitive communities. This and other recent studies and surveys will be integrated with this project with the assistance of the AES and the Chamber of Commerce staff.

## **Brand Positioning**

A branding document will be prepared that will consist of several components:

- **Core values** — the statements that set the Manistee County brand(s) apart from all others
- **Personality** — the unique attributes or characteristics of the brand that will be personified in all future Manistee County messages and communications
- **Positioning Statement** — the brief statement or paragraph that exemplifies the values, character and personality of Manistee County
- **Tagline** — the memorable one word or phrase that succinctly sums up Manistee County

AES staff will assist in gathering information to support development of these outcomes.

## Brand Outreach

Outreach will encompass the following:

- **Communications Plan**
  - Recommendations on how, when and where to use the branding tools will be utilized to formulate a strategic plan for implementing the branding results with targeted customers.
- **Organizing the Message**
  - In tandem with the communications plan, a system for organizing and ordering the attractions and attributes of the county within the context of the brand will be developed.
  - The plan will afford flexibility for growth and training for the Branding Learning Community and stakeholders, the group responsible for conveying the messages of the brand, as it encompasses the entire county.
- **Logo**
  - A logo will be developed that is consistent with the branding results.
- **Brand Imagery**
  - Stakeholders shall review distinct options that reflect the look and feel that maintains consistency with the brand and brand implementation.
- **Identity**
  - Integration of the tagline, logo and other branding findings into an identity system to communicate the brand.

AES staff will be available to assist in developing, producing and disseminating materials, as required.

## Brand Implementation - Marketing

First, at least three economic development targets will be identified for brand implementation that requires a collaborative marketing approach. Next, the strategic and tactical components of the marketing strategy will be developed. Finally, the strategic marketing plan will be implemented. This process will be focused on three expected outcomes:

- **Education and Sustainability.** Applied experiential education with brand application and systematic marketing for a diverse community team
- **Continuous Improvement.** Development of a system that can be followed for setting targets, development, implementation, and assessment so that future efforts can be strengthened and improved.

- **Success!** Meaning jobs and business growth for Manistee County

AES staff will be responsible for developing and implementing the marketing initiatives, including coordination with local organizations, agencies and businesses.

## **Mentoring**

Following the first phase of implementation, there shall be a structured process for mentoring, through the use of professional consultation, to help guide and teach the community how to effectively use, apply and communicate the brand identity to capitalize on competitive positions ultimately attracting business, industry, families and visitors to Manistee County. This phase of the project will build capacity, provide continuity for implementation that is essential to achieving the expected results, and assist communities within Manistee County make distinctions based upon the county-wide brand.

AES will coordinate consultant mentoring efforts county-wide.

## **VI. Expected Results**

Historically, there has been no concerted effort to develop brand identities for Manistee County and use those brand identities to effectively market the county to expand and attract businesses and create jobs. In the past, branding and marketing may not have been considered priorities given the county's focus on attracting and retaining manufacturing. While manufacturing has rebounded remarkably and is alive, well and growing in Manistee County, there is agreement on all fronts that:

- Manistee County has not done an adequate job of packaging itself and has done little to establish a competitive position based on differentiation and brand identities
- Manistee County's economic conditions will not and can not be measurably improved through traditional strategies
- Without a sustained initiative to develop and implement a branding strategy accompanied by focused marketing, Manistee County and its communities can not and will not make meaningful cost-effective progress to improve the economic conditions

With this project, the expected results are as follows:

- **Securing More Jobs, More Businesses.** The results of the branding initiative will focus marketing on businesses and business sectors for business growth leading to expansion and creation of new jobs. This will be done initially through the proposed implementation and mentoring period and continuing with support of the county-wide team through experiential learning and continuous improvement. While it is not possible to accurately project the actual impact of the branding initiative in terms of jobs or

income, the results and pay-back from this proposal are expected to be very significant.

- **Unifying Around a Marketing Focus.** For the first time ever, there will be county-wide unity about the brand, the messages, economic development, and job creation targets. There will be unified conversation about and selling the county based on credible, legitimate claims. Manistee County will be marshaling and applying the economic development attributes and resources more efficiently and more effectively than ever before.
- **Differentiating Niches.** With the county-wide branding and marketing implementation completed, communities throughout the county will leverage those resources to achieve their own distinction and focus. A prime example is the City of Manistee. Rather than launch an independent branding and marketing initiative, the city has opted to support this application and follow on the heels of the county-wide initiative. By partnering in this process, the community leaderships of Onkama, Bear Lake, Arcadia, Brethren, Wellston, Copemish and Filer Township will be part of the county-wide branding team and implementation process. These entities will experience the meaning, value, and benefit of branding and marketing and how it can be specifically adapted to serve each community.
- **Defining Real Regional Opportunities.** Through this project, Manistee County will be better equipped to define and quantify those opportunities that can only be realistically targeted through a regional approach where resources and assets must be leveraged, defined, quantified and articulated to bring jobs and economic development to the area.

## VII. Submission Requirements

Eight copies of proposals must be received in writing (fax or email not accepted) on or before 5 p.m. on Friday, August 8 2008 at:

Alliance for Economic Success  
ATTN: Branding RFP  
11 Cypress  
Manistee, MI 49660

Responses to this RFP must include the following:

### Introduction to Managing Organization

Because this RFP consists of several components and expectations, respondents are encouraged to develop a project team consisting of more than one organization, when

possible, to ensure sufficient capability exists to meet the goals and objectives of the project. Respondents must provide:

- Organization name
- Contact name
- Address
- Phone and FAX numbers
- Email address
- Web site address
- History of the organization
- Include a summary of the organization's vision, mission, goals and objectives, if available

## **Project Team**

- Review of all organizations, groups or institutions to be involved in the project, including contact information for each organization.
- An identification of the name and qualification of the Project Manager. Attach a complete resume, including professional licenses or certifications and experience with managing similar projects.

## **Project Experience**

- Provide detailed information about prior projects or work that best supports the capabilities of the respondent to perform the work required to achieve the desired results.
- Provide at least three references for similar work or projects.

## **Project Management**

Submit a narrative that summarizes:

- The management approach for the project; including the formation, use and development of the Learning Community
- Accountability with the AES
- Communication on progress
- Cost management and cost control processes
- Schedule management
- Quality control

## **Project Description**

Submit a narrative that addresses:

- Assessment of best practices involving community branding processes and how such best practices will be identified and used in this project
- The scope of work for the project; include a description of major work elements and expected outcomes that are consistent with the goals, objectives, and results described in this RFP
- A project schedule for all major work elements and corresponding budget. The project budget should estimate costs for the following:
  - Direct Personnel
  - Indirect Personnel (Subcontracts)
  - Fringe benefits
  - Supplies and materials
  - Travel
  - Other (please list)

Up to \$40,000 is available to support contractual work to perform this project, not including the work to be performed by AES staff or volunteers in support of the project.

## VIII. Selection Process

Qualifications are the primary selection consideration; costs are secondary given the limited amount budgeted for contractual work. Proposals will be evaluated by a diverse team that will recommend a contractor to the AES. Evaluation factors, subject to review and modification by that team, will be generally as follows:

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Points</b>
Qualifications to achieve goals, objectives and Intended results	20
Prior experience with similar projects	20
Management approach, including development and work with Learning Community	20
Project description <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thoroughness of scope of work in perspective to project goals, objectives and intended results</li> <li>• use of best practices in carrying out the scope of work</li> <li>• thoroughness of the project schedule and budget</li> </ul>	20
Strength of work program covering marketing and mentoring to achieve desired results	20

## **IX. Cancellation of RFP**

This RFP may be cancelled or any or all bids or proposals may be rejected in whole or in part. Proposals that do not comply with all criteria set forth in this RFP are subject to disqualification.

## **X. Other**

All respondents will be informed of the decision made about the contractor retained. Respondents will not be provided with detailed information about the rating of their response or the relative rating or ranking of respondents. Respondents may be requested to personally appear for an interview(s). Every attempt will be made to provide at least seven days notice.

## **XI. Questions**

Questions may be directed to:

Tim Ervin  
Alliance for Economic Success  
11 Cypress Street  
Manistee, MI 49660  
PH: 231-723-4325  
Email: [betsy@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com](mailto:betsy@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com)