



HIGHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

2998 W. Pearl City Road, Freeport, IL. 61032

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Brand Pulse and Community Needs Assessment

Introduction

Highland Community College (HCC) is seeking proposals from qualified consulting firms to conduct a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment that will serve as the foundation for the College's next Strategic Plan.

The selected consultant will evaluate Highland Community College's position within its service region by examining community perceptions, institutional brand awareness, prospective student expectations, workforce demands, changing demographics, and emerging educational trends. The assessment should provide actionable recommendations that will guide strategic priorities, enrollment growth, academic programming, marketing, community partnerships, and workforce development over the next three years.

Background

Highland Community College offers comprehensive academic programs, including career and technical education, transfer degrees, community education, and workforce training. The College also enriches the region through theatre, art, music, and other cultural opportunities. Accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, Highland serves a primarily rural district from its campus in Freeport, Illinois, and is conveniently located within the tri-state region, providing access to several major metropolitan areas.

This Request for Proposal (RFP) outlines the minimum qualifications, scope of services, and submission requirements for firms interested in providing these services. Issuance of this RFP does not obligate Highland Community College to award a contract.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the communities served by Highland Community College and identify opportunities for future growth.

The assessment should help answer questions such as:

- How is Highland Community College currently perceived by prospective students, employers, alumni, community members, and other stakeholders?
- What educational, workforce, and training needs currently exist within the district?
- How are demographic shifts expected to impact enrollment and programming?

- What barriers prevent prospective students from attending Highland?
- What academic programs and workforce credentials are most needed over the next 5–10 years?
- How can Highland strengthen its brand and better communicate its value?
- What strategic priorities should guide the College over the next planning cycle?

Scope of Services

The selected consultant shall provide, at a minimum, the following services:

1. Community Needs Assessment

Conduct a comprehensive assessment of Highland Community College's district and analysis of data from such sources as the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, US census Bureau, National Center for Education Statistics, IL Department of Employment Security, IL State Board of Education, IL Department of Revenue to include:

- Population and demographic trends
- Economic conditions
- Educational attainment
- Workforce composition
- Industry growth projections
- Labor market demand
- Community assets and challenges

2. Brand Assessment

Evaluate Highland Community College's current brand and market position by assessing:

- Community awareness
- Institutional reputation
- Brand perception
- Competitive positioning
- Marketing effectiveness
- Employer and community perceptions

Recommendations should include opportunities to strengthen Highland's identity and visibility throughout the district.

3. Prospective Student Research

Assess the needs, expectations, and decision-making factors of prospective students, including:

- Traditional high school students
- Adult learners
- Career changers
- Dual credit students
- Underrepresented populations

Research should identify:

- Student population trends such as race/ethnicity, income, mobility, as well as performance indicators such as graduation rates, SAT scores, etc.
- Enrollment barriers
- Preferred communication methods
- Program interests
- Student service expectations
- Factors influencing college selection

4. Workforce Needs Assessment

Evaluate regional workforce needs by engaging employers, workforce agencies, economic development organizations, and community partners.

The assessment should identify:

- High-demand occupations
- Emerging industries
- Skills gaps
- Credential needs
- Opportunities for new academic and workforce programs
- Partnership opportunities

5. Stakeholder Engagement

Develop and implement an engagement plan that includes a variety of stakeholder groups, which may include:

- Current students
- Prospective students
- Alumni
- Faculty and staff
- Employers
- Business and industry leaders
- K-12 partners
- Community organizations
- Economic development agencies
- Local government officials
- Board of Trustees

Methods will include interviews, focus groups, surveys, listening sessions, or other appropriate engagement strategies.

6. Strategic Planning Support

Using assessment findings, provide strategic planning support that includes:

- SWOT Analysis
- Environmental Scan
- Strategic priorities
- Institutional opportunities
- Challenges and risks
- Measurable recommendations

- Performance indicators
- Executive summary suitable for Board presentation

Deliverables

The selected consultant shall provide:

- Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Report
- Executive Summary
- Workforce Analysis
- Demographic Analysis
- Brand Assessment Report
- Stakeholder Engagement Summary
- Survey and Focus Group Results
- Strategic Planning Recommendations
- Presentation of findings to the Board of Trustees and College Leadership
- Electronic copies of all reports, data, and presentation materials

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include:

- Firm overview and qualifications
- Relevant experience conducting higher education community needs assessments
- Experience working with community colleges
- Proposed project methodology
- Project timeline
- Staffing plan
- References from at least three similar projects
- Cost proposal
- Sample reports from similar projects (if available)

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based upon the following criteria:

Experience with Strategic Planning in industries such as higher education, non-profit, or healthcare

Experience Conducting Community Needs Assessments

Understanding of Project Goals

Proposed Methodology

Timeline for research and report development

References and Past Performance

Cost

Vendor meeting - Vendors selected for preliminary consideration will be required to meet with College representatives before the final selection to present their proposals and respond to questions.

Desired Outcomes

Upon completion of the project, Highland Community College expects to have:

- A clear understanding of community perceptions and institutional brand.
- Reliable data regarding prospective student needs and enrollment opportunities.
- A comprehensive workforce and labor market analysis.
- An understanding of changing demographics and their impact on future enrollment.
- Recommendations for future academic programming and workforce initiatives.
- Actionable strategies to strengthen community engagement and institutional visibility.
- Data-driven recommendations to support the College's Strategic Planning process.

Proposal Submission and Questions

Providers shall send via Email, US Post Office mail, or hand deliver 3 copies of their proposal to:

Stacey Moore, Executive Assistant, Highland Community College
 2998 West Pearl City Road
 Freeport, IL 61032
 815-599-3582 or Stacey.Moore@highland.edu

Responses to this RFP are due by 2:00 p.m. on Monday, September 14, 2026. Proposals that do not follow the RFP format, do not include all the minimum requirements specified, including the required documentation, are not submitted by the due date and time may not be considered. HCC retains the right to accept, reject, or negotiate proposals received as well as to vary or waive any provisions set forth in this request for proposals in the best interests of HCC.

An optional pre-proposal meeting will be held via Zoom at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, August 31, 2026. This meeting will provide an overview of the project expectations and respond to questions. RSVP for the pre-proposal meeting by contacting Stacey Moore at the email address above. Questions regarding this RFP should be submitted to the above mentioned. Providers may not contact other Administrators, Board of Trustees members, or employees of HCC without permission.

Attachments

Attached are the required proposal forms and statements to be filled out completely, signed, and notarized (statements only) and should be accompanied by any supporting material that Provider would like to have considered.

PROPOSAL FORM

PROPOSAL SUBMITTED

BY _____

DATE _____

BASE PROPOSAL

The undersigned agrees to perform at a minimum, all items listed in “Scope of Work (Base Proposal)” plus any additional items required for compliance by NFPA 70E not included in “Scope of Work” for the sum of:

_____ DOLLARS(\$ _____).

ALTERNATE PROPOSAL

The undersigned agrees to perform all items listed in “Additional Services (Alternate Proposal)” for the sum of:

_____ DOLLARS(\$ _____).

ADDNEDA RECEIVED

The undersigned acknowledges receipt of Addenda _____ to _____ inclusive.

VENDOR

ADDRESS

BY: _____

TITLE: _____

DATE: _____

Certification Form

To: Highland Community College District 519, 2998 West Pearl City Road,
Freeport, IL 61032

Pertaining to the proposal for: _____

I/We as the Provider certify that I/we have not been barred from bidding on this project as a result of a conviction for either bid-rigging or bid-rotating under Article 33E of the "Criminal Code of 1961".

I/We also hereby certify that we conform to the current rules and regulations of the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Commission and comply with the employment opportunity clause as required by the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Commission.

I/We also hereby certify that we have a written sexual harassment policy in place in full compliance with Section 2-105 of the Illinois Human Rights Act and will, upon request, be able to provide such written policy to the Department of Human Rights.

Name of Provider

Title

Date

Business Enterprise Act Form

To: Highland Community College District 519, 2998 West Pearl City Road, Freeport, IL 61032

Provider may qualify as a business owner as defined in the Illinois Business Enterprise for Minorities, Females, and Persons with Disabilities Act under the following criteria. Check all boxes that apply (if Provider does not qualify, check "Not Applicable"):

- ☐ Female: shall mean a person who is a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States and who is of the female gender
- ☐ Person with Disability: means a person who is a citizen or lawful resident of the United States and is a person qualifying as being disabled
- ☐ Minority Person: shall mean a person who is a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States and who is any of the following:
 - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
 - ☐ Asian
 - ☐ Black or African American
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Not Applicable

Certifying Organization (if Provider does not qualify, check "Not Applicable")

- ☐ DCMS (Department of Central Management Services) Business Enterprise Program
- ☐ CMBDC (Chicago Minority Business Development Council)
- ☐ IDOT (Illinois Department of Transportation)
- ☐ WBDC (Women's Business Development Center)
- ☐ Other (Please Explain) _____
- ☐ Not Applicable

Name of Provider

Title

Date