



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
Destination Branding and Marketing Consultant

Issue Date: October 20, 2025

RFP Due Date: November 17, 2025

Issued by Newark Alliance

Newark Alliance
60 Park Place, Suite 1016
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Submissions To: marketing@newark-alliance.org

Greetings Prospective Partner,

You are invited to respond to this Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by Newark Alliance for Newark Happening, the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Newark, New Jersey.

Newark is at a pivotal moment. The city is experiencing steady growth and transformation, marked by investments in infrastructure and public space, a thriving arts and cultural scene, and a strong and expanding corporate footprint. Anchored by major employers and institutions in sectors like finance, logistics, and tech, Newark's economy is growing, and so is the momentum and pride of its people. That momentum is not just about what is happening downtown, but about what is possible across every neighborhood. With the 2026 FIFA World Cup approaching and global attention turning our way, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reintroduce Newark to the world and to ourselves.

To meet this moment, Newark Alliance is seeking a bold, creative, and strategic brand agency partner to help articulate a modern and authentic vision of Newark as a destination, and a place to live. This multi-phase assignment includes:

Phase 1

December 2026 - XX

- Brand platform refresh: A revitalized brand architecture for Newark Alliance orgs and platforms, informed by a comprehensive, agency-run brand audit and measurement process, including hierarchy, updated identity, target segmentation, messaging, channel framework, website redesign(s), strategic social guidance, and a suite of brand tools.

Phase 2

February 2026 – April 2026

- 2026 FIFA World Cup campaign: A mini initiative built around the revised brand identity to generate buzz, excitement, and engagement around Newark's role in the event. Can serve as a test campaign for 2026 brand campaign and "tentpole tourist" target segment.

Phase 3

TBD 2026 (post-election)

- Citywide brand campaign: A broad-reaching effort to build civic pride, drive visitation, and communicate Newark's distinctive story.

The selected agency should bring deep expertise in place branding and digital engagement, along with a thoughtful, collaborative approach to community engagement. They must be adept at involving local stakeholders and Newark-based talent throughout the process, ensuring the work is not only grounded in lived experience, but also creates space for co-creation and shared ownership. The process must reflect and respect the depth, diversity, and dynamism of Newark's people and neighborhoods, and ensure that residents see themselves in the story we tell. Ultimately, this effort is not just about changing perceptions. It is about unlocking real, inclusive economic opportunity for Newarkers by driving pride, investment, foot traffic, and participation across the city.

Destination marketing is a vital part of Newark's broader economic development strategy. Newark Happening's expanded role reflects a commitment to using storytelling and brand strategy not only to attract visitors, but to

support local businesses, empower cultural institutions, and create pathways for residents to benefit from increased visibility and investment. From artists and entrepreneurs to students, residents, and business leaders, this brand must reflect a city of ambition, resilience, and creativity.

We are ready to do something Newark has never done before: create a destination brand that is deeply rooted in community, bold in its reach, and transformative in its impact. The ideal agency will bring experience in place branding, digital strategy, and campaign execution, and demonstrate a clear commitment to equity, inclusion, and collaboration throughout.

This RFP outlines the scope, timeline, and submission guidelines in detail to ensure a fair and transparent process. We look forward to your proposal and to partnering on something extraordinary.

Your response should include:

- **Cover Page.** Please include company name, primary point of contact (name, title, email), company headquarters address, website, and relevant social media handles.
- **Page 2.** Evaluation Criteria Summary & Newark Connection: Provide a brief summary (up to 500 words) explaining how your company meets the evaluation criteria outlined on page 5. Include relevant experience in tourism branding and marketing, particularly for civic or place-based clients. We also ask that you describe your company's connection to Newark, or the use of local talent and resources as an integral part of your approach.
- **Page 3.** Company Profile & Relevant Experience:
 - Submit a description of your company and leadership team (maximum 250 words).
 - Follow with a short summary (250 words) highlighting your firm's experience in destination marketing, brand development, campaign strategy, and creative execution. Emphasize work with place-based, civic, or tourism clients.
- **Page 4.** Consulting Proposal: Provide a detailed consulting proposal that outlines your approach to the Scope of Work described in this RFP including a sample budget and timeline. Include information on your brand measurement tools, strategic methodology, creative process, stakeholder engagement practices, and project management style including approach to timing (managing overlapping phases).
- **Page 5.** Case Examples: Share two client examples in which your firm led similar branding or marketing efforts. In no more than 250 words per project, describe the client's goals, your approach, the outcomes, and whether the full scope was completed.
- **Page 6.** References: List two professional references. For each, include the contact's name, organization, phone number, email, and a brief summary of the services you provided.
- **Page 7.** Additional Information: Use this page (up to 250 words or equivalent links/media) to include any additional details that you believe will make your company our #1 selection (250 words or links, etc., max)

We look forward to receiving your RFP response. Good Luck!

Newark Alliance

GENERAL INFORMATION

About Newark Happening:

Newark Happening serves as the official destination marketing function for Newark, New Jersey — a city rich in culture, creativity, and community. Central to Newark Happening's re-imagined mission is recognizing that Newark Happening is more than Newark's promotional marketing agency.

Newark Happening embraces a community-centered role as destination stewards in the work of elevating Newark's profile, growing Newark's visitor economy, and centering prosperity for Newarkers and Newark's local business community. Newark Happening is charged with showcasing the city's attractions, events, and experiences in ways that are authentic, inclusive, and compelling to both visitors and residents. From renowned institutions like the Prudential Center and NJPAC to local festivals, historic neighborhoods, and a thriving food scene, Newark has countless stories to tell — and Newark Happening ensures those stories reach the world.

About Newark Alliance:

The Newark Alliance, through the combined strength and collaboration of its Members, drives inclusive economic growth for all of Newark, New Jersey. Our Members comprise Newark's premier businesses, anchor institutions, and community partners, including Fortune 100 & 500 companies and several of the country's top universities, hospitals, and arts institutions. United by a shared vision, the Alliance and its Members work collaboratively to cement Newark's status as one of America's most diverse, prosperous, exciting, and equitable cities.

In July 2025, Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka announced after unanimous approval by the Newark City Council, the Newark Downtown District (NDD) and the Greater Newark Convention and Visitors Bureau (GNCVB), aka Newark Happening, united under the Newark Alliance. The newly merged organization now delivers key elements of Newark's economic development, community development, tourism, and strategic initiatives, as well as ensuring downtown Newark continues to be a vibrant, safe, and fun place to live, work, and play in deep partnership with the City of Newark, Invest Newark and other organizations.

Through its transition to one consolidated organization, the City of Newark will experience:

Improved downtown district management and development: This will enable greater scale in the execution of public improvements, community engagement, events, and activations managed by the Newark Alliance, in collaboration with organizations including Invest Newark. The growing list of these opportunities includes Halsey Fest, Newark Fan Fest, Festivals United and activations leading up to the World Cup in 2026.

Aligned visitor, resident, and corporate attraction: The expanded Newark Alliance will continue to build Newark's brand identity as a vibrant cultural hub, attracting both visitors and major businesses to the city. Alongside partners like Invest Newark and the City of Newark Arts & Education District, Newark Alliance will amplify local business' success stories to support current business owners and attract new investment.

Strengthened ability to meet Newark's greatest challenges: Building on 25 years of helping achieve Newark's strategic priorities, the unified Alliance will allow it to bring more resources than ever before to address challenges facing Newarkers and make meaningful impact—from ending chronic homelessness to embarking on the largest tree planting campaign in decades.

About the RFP:

The purpose of this RFP is to identify and engage an experienced agency partner to lead a comprehensive rebrand of Newark Happening and reposition Newark as a must-visit city. This effort will include the development of a new brand identity, a modern and accessible website, and the design and launch of an integrated marketing campaign to promote the city to target audiences. In addition, the selected partner will facilitate an inclusive stakeholder engagement process to map the needs and perspectives of Newark's tourism ecosystem and develop messaging, positioning, and creative assets that reflect Newark's unique voice and values.

This initiative is about articulating a bold and cohesive DMO proposition for Newark that amplifies what makes the city distinctive. Newark Happening seeks a partner with deep tourism expertise, a demonstrated commitment to place-based storytelling, and an intentional approach to incorporating local talent and cultural knowledge into the creative process. Ultimately, this work will help strengthen Newark's reputation, increase visitation, and equip partners citywide with tools to proudly promote the city.

PROVISIONS AND LIMITATIONS:

The purpose of this RFP is to ensure maximum, open, and free competition in the solicitation and procurement of the goods and services described herein. This RFP is not to be considered as a purchase agreement or contract or as a commitment of any kind; nor does it obligate Newark Alliance to award any contract or pay for costs incurred prior to the execution of a contract unless such costs are specifically authorized in writing.

SCOPE OF WORK

The engagement will commence immediately upon contract execution and be completed in a phased approach to be outlined and mutually agreed upon in the contract. The selected agency will work closely with Newark Alliance staff, leadership, and key stakeholders to ensure all deliverables align with the organization's mission, brand standards, and strategic objectives.

- Project Management
 - Timeline:
 - Maintain a clear project timeline, lead regular check-ins, and incorporate stakeholder feedback
 - Deliver a mid-project progress summary and a final wrap-up report with key outcomes and recommendations
 - Stakeholder Mapping:
 - Map all relevant internal and external stakeholders, identifying needs, wants, and priorities. Align and prioritize stakeholder considerations to current scopes of work, activities, and areas of investment and resource allocation.
 - Facilitate stakeholder input sessions and incorporate community insights into brand and campaign development
 - Intentionally involve Newark-based creatives, vendors, and institutions throughout the project.
- Brand Architecture:

- Brand Strategy and Visual Identity:
 - Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of current reputation and perception, strengths, and gaps for Newark Alliance, Newark Downtown District, and Newark Happening supplemented with local data and insights from venues, cultural institutions, and community partners. Final metrics and methodology to be agreed upon with Newark Alliance.
 - Leverage learned insights to develop a refreshed brand identity and messaging framework grounded in Newark's cultural assets and tourism vision
 - Deliver a comprehensive brand book with visual guidelines and usage recommendations
 - Identify a clear role and goal for each owned channel
- Website Redesign:
 - Design and launch a mobile-responsive, ADA-compliant Newark Happening website optimized for visitor engagement
 - Provide CMS training and documentation for Newark Happening staff
 - Media Kit
 - Create a flexible toolkit with logos, co-branded templates, messaging, and promotional assets for use by partners, media, local businesses and organizations
 - Ensure assets are adaptable, user-friendly, and aligned with the new brand
 - Always-on branding
 - Strengthen ongoing experiential programming with consistent brand expression and integrated storytelling across all activations.
- World Cup Campaign
 - Leveraging the new brand architecture and building on the Newark brand campaign, design a tactical campaign to drive buzz, excitement and engagement around Newark's role in the 2026 FIFA World Cup
- Newark Brand Campaign:
 - Conceptualize and execute a marketing campaign to launch the new brand across digital, social, and select print/out-of-home channels
 - Produce original creative assets and recommend a media strategy aligned with Newark's target audiences
 - Conduct post-campaign measurement to track success from benchmark analysis

The agency will be expected to demonstrate a collaborative approach, maintain open lines of communication, and deliver all work to the highest professional standards. All materials produced will become the property of Newark Alliance.

MANDATORIES

Newark-Based:

Preference will be given to vendors that can provide proof of a connection to Newark, whether through previous work in the city, partnerships with Newark-based organizations, team members located in Newark, or plans to engage local talent as part of this project.

VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS

- Minimum 5 years of experience in tourism marketing, destination branding, or place-based campaigns, with a strong portfolio of work for cities, DMOs, or cultural organizations.
- Demonstrated expertise in brand identity, website development, and multi-channel marketing; experience engaging diverse communities and incorporating local talent is strongly preferred.
- Vendor is in good standing with the City of Newark, County of Essex, and State of New Jersey, necessary to perform services as specified under this RFP.

SELECTION CRITERIA

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Tourism & Place-Based Experience	Demonstrated success in tourism marketing, destination branding, and place-based campaigns, including experience with DMOs or city agencies.	25%
Quality and Clarity of Proposal	Strength, organization, and clarity of the proposal; demonstrates strategic thinking, responsiveness to RFP, and understanding of Newark Happening's goals.	20%
Creative Approach & Brand Strategy	Strength of proposed creative concepts, storytelling, and brand strategy; evidence of bold ideas grounded in audience insight and local context.	20%
Website and Campaign Executive	Experience and capabilities in developing destination websites, launching integrated campaigns, and producing adaptable marketing toolkits.	15%
Price and Value	Cost effectiveness in relation to the scope of work, clarity of pricing structure, and ability to deliver high-quality outcomes within budget.	10%
Local Talent	Demonstrated plan to engage Newark-based creatives, subcontractors, or vendors.	10%

RFP TIMELINE

RFP Release Date	Oct 20, 2025
Proposal Deadline (<i>allows for 4 weeks</i>)	Nov 17, 2025

Proposal Reviews	Weeks of Nov 17, 2025 + Nov 25, 2025
Finalist Interviews	Weeks of Dec 1, 2025 + Dec 8, 2025
Agency Selection & Notification	Week of Dec 15, 2025
Contract begins	Week of Jan 5, 2026

Stay informed and register your interest by emailing your contact information to:
marketing@newark-alliance.org