



# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:

## *Baltimore City 988 Public Education Campaign*

**Release Date: November 18, 2025**

**Pre-Proposal Conference: November 24, 2025 @ 12:00 p.m.**

**Proposals Due: December 18, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.**

**Anticipated Award Notification: January 25, 2026**

**Anticipated Contract Start: February 1, 2026**

**Issued by:**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore, Inc.  
100 South Charles Street, Tower II, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

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# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

## ***Baltimore City 988 Public Education Campaign***

### **I. Overview of the Project**

#### **A. Overview of BHSB**

[Behavioral Health System Baltimore, Inc. \(BHSB\)](#) is a non-profit organization that serves as the Local Behavioral Health Authority (LBHA) on behalf of Baltimore City and operates in this role under the authority of the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). BHSB is responsible for planning, managing and monitoring resources, programs and policies within the larger Medicaid fee-for-service system, as well as services directly funded by BHSB through private and public grants. We use our knowledge of what services are available, and how to structure system resources, to meet the unique needs of the communities we serve.

BHSB envisions a city where people live and thrive in communities that promote and support behavioral health and wellness. We are committed to building a system of care that serves all community members in need of services. We work to ensure that the most appropriate care is provided, taking into consideration family and community differences.

#### **B. Description of Project**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) seeks one qualified full-service social marketing consultant to lead a comprehensive community engagement and outreach campaign. The goal is to increase awareness and use of urgent behavioral health services, specifically the 988 Helpline, among Baltimore City residents and stakeholders. The campaign should promote behavior change in how individuals respond to an urgent need for mental health and substance use services—encouraging them to call or refer others to call 988.

Launched nationally in July 2022, 988 is a free, 24/7 helpline offering confidential support and referrals, including for opioid use disorder and overdose prevention. This initiative builds on the regional CALL 988 campaign across Central Maryland and is funded through the Opioid Restitution Fund to support the BHSB 988 Helpline Awareness and Use Campaign.

The Opioid Restitution Fund BHSB 988 Lifeline Awareness and Use Campaign is a five-year, \$10 million initiative funded by the Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs. BHSB has allocated \$1.3 million in Year 1 for market research, campaign planning, and campaign activation. Funding during years two to five will support campaign implementation, promotion, and ongoing optimization.

## C. Scope of Service

The selected consultant will be responsible for developing a comprehensive outreach and awareness campaign to promote the 988 Helpline in Baltimore City. This includes creating messaging for all people, identifying effective communication channels, and producing campaign materials tailored to the targeted audiences. The campaign should build on existing efforts, including prior outreach conducted by the Central Maryland Regional Crisis System, and incorporate insights from relevant market research to maximize engagement and impact.

### Year 1

The selected consultant will review existing market research and assess the effectiveness of the previous CALL 988 outreach campaign conducted by the Central Maryland Regional Crisis System.

#### Market Research & Campaign Planning

- Use qualitative and/or quantitative methods to develop effective impact messages to convince:
  - people in Baltimore City to utilize community providers and/or urgent behavioral health services (i.e., 988 Helpline, mental health or substance use urgent care services, etc.) rather than calling 911, the police, or using hospital emergency departments.
  - referral sources (e.g., physician practices, hospitals, behavioral health, organizations, etc.) in Baltimore City to refer their patients, members, etc. to community providers and/or urgent behavioral health services rather than having them call 911, the police, or access hospital emergency departments.
- Conduct market research to identify target demographics, behaviors, and platform preferences. Use surveys, focus groups, and social listening tools to gather data.
- Determine which media sources are most effective for communicating these messages to both residents and referral sources (e.g., television, radio, direct mail, streaming, digital, social media, and/or influencers, etc.)
- Disaggregate all market research and message testing data by at least income and age, and family, community, and regional differences. Language interpretation/translation for market research activities should be included when appropriate.
- All research should be conducted with a representative sample of Baltimore City community members by geography, age, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.
- Comprehensive Campaign Plan: Develop a full campaign strategy that incorporates both paid marketing and community engagement components.

The plan must include a detailed budget for fiscal year 2027 that aligns with the allocated funding and must be submitted no later than March 31, 2026.

- Final Market Research and Message Testing Plan: Submit a detailed plan outlining the proposed methodology, tools, and timeline for conducting market research and message testing. This plan should be delivered within a mutually agreed-upon timeframe following contract execution.
- Market Research and Message Testing Report: Conduct a thorough analysis and synthesis of all collected data. The final report should present key findings, offer insights into audience perceptions, and provide evidence-based recommendations for refining messaging strategies.

## **Years 2-5**

The results from the year one (1) evaluation will inform the development of innovative outreach strategies designed to expand the campaign's reach and appeal to broader and more diverse audiences across Baltimore City.

### **Campaign Development**

Develop a clear and cohesive campaign theme and messaging for CALL 988 by building on existing efforts and drawing insights from past behavioral health and hotline awareness campaigns locally and nationally.

- Paid media: Develop a paid media strategy that includes, as appropriate, the development and purchase of traditional mass media (e.g., broadcast and/or cable TV, radio, streaming, etc.), sponsored social media posts, digital ads (video and static), out-of-home advertising, etc.
- Earned media: Design an earned media strategy that includes, as appropriate, media events, radio interviews, feature articles, editorial board visits, etc.
- Social media: Craft a social media strategy based on the market research and message testing you conduct.
  - What social outlets would you likely use in this campaign and why?
  - How would you use social media influencers?

### **Collateral materials**

- Create and make available compelling print materials such as posters, rack cards, specialized materials for libraries, medical and behavioral health provider offices, hospitals, faith communities and other locations. Campaign materials should include likenesses of people representative of the communities we strive to reach.

### **Community Engagement Strategies**

The selected applicant shall support BHSB staff and community partners in implementing comprehensive community engagement strategies designed to

effectively reach and engage the target population throughout Baltimore City. Proposed strategies should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Paid Community Engagement Initiatives:** Deploy and manage street outreach teams composed of trained community members or professionals who can engage residents directly in neighborhoods, public spaces, and community events. These teams should be competent and representative of the communities they serve.
- **Collaborative Messaging and Outreach:** Work in partnership with local organizations, faith-based groups, and other community stakeholders to disseminate key messages through coordinated channels. This includes:
  - Distribution of print collateral (e.g., flyers, brochures, posters) in high-traffic and strategic locations.
  - Amplification of messaging through social media platforms, leveraging both BHSB's and partners' networks.
  - Development of tailored content that resonates with diverse audiences across Baltimore City.

#### Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

The selected applicant shall develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of the community engagement campaign. This framework must include:

- **Baseline Establishment:** Identify and document key performance indicators Key Performance Indicator (KPI) prior to campaign launch to serve as benchmarks for measuring progress. Baselines may include metrics such as community awareness levels, engagement rates, and reach across target demographics.
- **Ongoing Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect quantitative and qualitative data throughout the campaign using tools such as surveys, outreach logs, social media analytics, and partner feedback. Data should be disaggregated by relevant demographics to ensure meaningful impact.
- **Real-Time Adaptation:** Use data insights to inform timely adjustments to campaign strategies. This may include refining messaging, reallocating outreach resources

#### **Project Deliverables**

The selected consultant will be responsible for the following deliverables in collaboration with BHSB:

- Submit a final Market Research/Message Testing Plan to BHSB within an agreed-upon timeframe between the selected firm and BHSB.
- Deliver a Market Research/Message Testing Report analyzing all data collected by BHSB and selected firm.
- Develop a full campaign plan that includes a paid marketing and community engagement budget for fiscal year 2027 that fits within the allocated budget for that year by March 31, 2026.

#### **D. Staffing Requirements**

- 1.0 FTE Senior Account Manager.
- Staff who are experienced in:
  - conducting market research, message testing, and data-driven campaign evaluation
  - conducting market research with all groups of people
  - capabilities for creative development, media planning, and placement across multiple platforms.
  - managing paid community engagement strategies (Street marketing
  - developing and executing responsive campaigns targeting all populations.

#### **E. Funding Availability**

The funding availability for this project is 1.3 million dollars, with options to renew annually, pending the availability of funding and performance.

#### **F. Risk Assessment**

BHSB completes a risk assessment as part of the procurement process. Applicants should be sure to provide the most recent available versions of all requested documentation with their RFP application.

#### **G. Contracting with BHSB**

Applicants selected through this process will enter into a contractual agreement with BHSB. Following a notification of selection, BHSB will issue a Letter of Award that provides details about the contract and the process for executing it. The selected applicant will be required to submit a new budget on BHSB's budget forms, which will be reviewed for allowable costs under the grant.

Please note that applicants may be asked to change their budgets and/or details of their proposals even if the proposal was selected for funding. Applicants new to BHSB's contract process are encouraged to review relevant forms available on our website here: <https://www.bhsbaltimore.org/for-providers/forms-for-providers>.

Contract Type and Payment

The contract and payment type that will result from this procurement is described below. Applicants are encouraged to consider whether their organization will be able to operate with this payment mechanism before applying for these funds.

#### Consultant contract

- Issued to a person or entity engaged in independent work as outlined in the contract. The total cost of the contract is based on a calculation that includes an hourly consultant rate and the estimated number of hours it will take to complete the scope of work.
- Payment is based on the costs reported for a specific period (e.g., hourly rate x # of hours worked that month).

BHSB issues payments once per month. Applicants should note that submitting required documents and reports late can result in delayed payment.

#### Contract Monitoring and Technical Assistance

Selected applicants will be required to submit regular program and financial reports to BHSB using an electronic contract management system. BHSB will review these reports to monitor progress and contract compliance throughout the contract term.

**Program reports** include an update on progress toward deliverables (e.g., number of people served, number of services delivered, etc.). Some program reports may also require organizations to attach a data report with additional information (e.g., consumer demographic information, process and/or outcomes data, etc.). BHSB monitors progress on these reports throughout the contract term and may offer technical assistance and support if deliverables are not on track to be met.

**Financial reports** are required to generate payment and involve submitting actual expenditures or invoices (depending on the contract type) and to monitor spending compared to the budget or award amount. If organizations are spending more or less than expected awarded throughout the contract term, BHSB may offer technical assistance and support to ensure the funding covers the contract term fully, and BHSB may reduce funding if all funds are not likely to be expended by the end of the contract term.

Please note that submitting program or financial reports late can result in delayed payment.

#### Verification of Services

BHSB audits all contracts to review whether the requirements set forth in the contract were completed as reported and that relevant federal, state, and local regulations were followed. This generally occurs after the conclusion of the contract period. Audits may be conducted remotely through a review of documents submitted to BHSB or on-site at the organization's location. Failure by consultants

to comply with the terms of any contract with BHSB may result in denial of future contracts with BHSB.

Applicants should be aware of best practices in documenting both programmatic and financial activities to aid in an efficient audit.

## II. Overview of RFP

### A. Purpose of RFP

BHSB seeks a qualified full-service social marketing firm to consult, design and implement a community engagement and outreach campaign that increases awareness of urgent behavioral health services. The campaign will encourage Baltimore City residents and stakeholders to change how they respond when there is an urgent need for mental health and substance use services—specifically, who they call or refer others to call.

### B. Applicant Eligibility

Applicants must meet all of the criteria outlined below to be considered eligible to be selected through this RFP process.

- In Good Standing with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation
- For applicants that currently receive grant funds from BHSB or did receive grant funds in prior years:
  - No outstanding financial audits
  - No money owed to BHSB
  - No current Corrective Action Plans (CAP) for which the applicant has not met identified targets more than two years beyond the date the CAP was issued.
  - No more than one (1) Accountability Compliance Audit in the two fiscal years preceding the current fiscal year that reflects unresolved deficiencies.

### C. Proposal Timeline and Specifications

#### 1. Timeline

Release Date:	November 18, 2025
Pre-Proposal Conference:	November 24, 2025, at 12:00 p.m.
Proposal Due:	December 18, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.
Anticipated Award Notification:	January 25, 2026
Anticipated Contract Start:	February 1, 2026
Anticipated Service Start:	February 1, 2026

#### 2. Pre-Proposal Conference

**Date:** November 24, 2025

**Time:** 12:00 pm

**Location:** Microsoft Teams meeting - Join on your computer or mobile app

**Click here to join the meeting:** [Baltimore City 988 Public Education Campaign Pre-Proposal Conference](#)

**Or call in (audio only): Dial in by phone**

[+1 443-819-0973,,397815381#](#) United States, Bel Air

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 397 815 381#

*Please join five minutes early to leave time to troubleshoot. If you have any problems accessing the meeting, please contact [Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org](mailto:Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org).*

Questions related to this RFP will be answered at the Pre-Proposal Conference. Questions posed during the conference and BHSB's responses will be posted on BHSB's website at <https://www.bhsbaltimore.org/for-providers/funding-opportunities/> by December 1, 2025

Individuals who attended the Pre-Proposal Conference will be notified by email when questions and answers are posted on BHSB's website.

*Questions received after this conference cannot be answered.*

### **3. Proposal Due Date, Time, and Location**

BHSB uses Survey Monkey Apply (SM Apply) to manage applications. All proposals must be submitted through this system. Applicants must register with the system ahead of time and submit narrative and supporting documents directly through the system. You are able to save your application and continue working on it before submitting it. BHSB encourages all applicants to test this system well in advance of submitting proposals.

Applicants can access SM Apply here: <https://bhsb.smapply.org/>

All proposals must be received no later than **5:00 pm EST on December 18, 2025**. All submitted proposals become the property of BHSB. If you are having technical troubles related to submitting your proposal, contact BHSB before the due date/time at [Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org](mailto:Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org).

*Proposals submitted after the due date/time cannot be considered.*

### **4. Interviews**

Applicants whose proposals rank highest by the Review Committee may be invited to an interview. The interview will include questions and a presentation.

Presentations must highlight previous public health campaigns, strategies, and implementation approaches for specific projects. A maximum of 20 minutes will be allowed for presentations.

## **5. Authorized Contact**

Applicants are advised that the authorized contact person for all matters concerning this RFP is Ashley Coston, whose contact information is listed below.

Ashley Coston, Procurement Lead

Email: [Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org](mailto:Procurements@BHSBaltimore.org)

**6. Anticipated Service Term:** February 1, 2026 – June 30, 2026, with options to renew annually pending availability of funding and performance.

## **D. Award of Contract**

The submission of a proposal does not, in any way, guarantee an award. BHSB is not responsible for any costs incurred related to the preparation of a proposal in response to this RFP. BHSB reserves the right to withdraw an award prior to execution of a contract with a selected applicant in BHSB's sole and absolute discretion.

BHSB will select the most qualified and responsive applicants through this RFP process. BHSB will enter into a contract with selected applicants following the notification of award. All selected applicants must comply with all terms and conditions applicable to contracts executed by BHSB.

## **E. RFP Postponement/Cancellation**

BHSB reserves the right to postpone or cancel this RFP, in whole or in part.

## **F. Applicant Appeal Process**

Applications must be complete and fully responsive to the below Proposal Narrative Outline and must include all required appendices. Applicants may file an appeal within five days of notification of non-selection. BHSB will not review new proposal materials that were not included in the application. BHSB will review the appeal letter and respond to the non-selected applicant within ten working days of receipt of the appeal.

### III. Format and Content of Proposal

#### A. Proposal Instructions

- Applicants must submit all required information using Survey Monkey Apply (SM Apply) accessible here: <https://bhsb.smapply.org/>. We recommend you start your application early so you know what to expect with the system.

***Late proposals will not be considered.***

- Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools are becoming increasingly prevalent. While AI is a helpful tool, it is important to ensure that proposals reflect authentic responses and realistic service delivery plans.
- It is the policy of BHSB to adhere to the rules and regulations in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which require appropriate safeguards to protect the confidentiality, integrity and security of all protected health information. No proposals submitted in response to this RFP should include individually identifiable health information.

For more information, please refer to the Guide to IT Privacy and Security of Electronic Health Information: <https://www.healthit.gov/topic/privacy-security-and-hipaa/health-it-privacy-and-security-resources-providers>.

#### B. Proposal Narrative Outline and Rating Criteria

The outline below shows the information being requested for applications and how points will be awarded during the review. Use SM Apply to submit your responses. See the instructions for more information about how to submit proposals.

##### 1. Organizational Background and Capacity (40 points)

- a. Provide an overview of your organization and relevant experience, including conducting market research people, utilizing multiple communications platforms, and managing paid community engagement strategies for public health campaigns (i.e., street marketing).
- b. Describe your organization's experience managing campaigns similar to this project. Additionally includes meeting contractual deliverables and obligations (including any contracts with BHSB), and your capacity to manage the programmatic and financial requirements of this grant.

##### 2. Service Delivery (40 points)

- a. Describe your organization's experience implementing behavioral health awareness and/or health behavior change campaigns. This can include collaboration with SAMHSA, state health departments, or similar organizations conducting public health initiatives.

- b. Describe your experience implementing a campaign across a geographic region with differences across the communities. Describe your approach to this kind of campaign.
- c. Identify any services that would be sub-contracted, with the specific responsibilities and a brief background of the sub-contractor(s).
- d. Describe how your firm/company collaborates with community partners to execute a campaign. If your proposal includes more than one organization, also describe which organization will serve as the lead, how long you have worked together, is your availability similar, and how you plan to work together (e.g., orchestrating hand-offs, etc.).

### **3. Staffing Plan (5 points)**

- a. Describe your recruiting and hiring process for specialized campaigns- ex- public health. Describe how your organization would strive to recruit, hire, and train people from the focus populations for paid community engagement work (i.e., street team outreach).

### **4. Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance (5 points)**

- a. Describe the types of data you will use to inform the planning process, including how you will collect, analyze, and present it. Provide examples of how data has been used to optimize campaign performance in past projects.

### **5. Implementation Timeline (5 points)**

- a. Provide a detailed timeline for the first year that includes all of the activities in this proposal. Attach an outline of all the steps necessary to fully operationalize this project and by when each step will be completed.

### **6. Proposed Budget (5 points)**

- a. Attach a line-item budget and budget narrative for the first year of work, aligning it with the staffing requirements and proposed activities. If applicants are submitting proposals with other organizations, note how funding will be split and for what activities. The budget should show the breakdown for labor and other direct costs, which may include research, ad buys, etc.)

### **7. Appendices**

- Must carry general liability and professional liability insurance, including coverage for marketing and outreach activities
- Organizational chart
- Three professional reference letters from previous partners that your firm has collaborated with including the project details and a few marketing materials.

- Resume or curriculum vitae for individuals/consultants working on this project
- Most recent final Financial Audit package including Findings and Management Letter from an independent auditor (preferred) OR a recent unaudited Income Statement **AND** Balance Sheet. If an audit is not available, please upload a statement detailing why.
- Most recent IRS 990 – Return of Organization Exempt from Income Taxes **OR** if an IRS 990 form is not required to be filed, the most recent Business Tax Return OR the Schedule C only of the most recent Personal Tax Return. (Please redact any social security numbers on the Schedule C).
- Certificate of Good Standing from the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (screenshots from the MDAT website will not be accepted). The certificate must be dated within one year of the RFP submission due date. (If the selected applicant’s business is registered in a state other than Maryland, they will be required to register in Maryland as part of the contracting process).