

RFP: Public Relations & Online Advertising Firm to Serve the Future Ready Apprenticeship Center of Excellence (The Center)

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Proposal Requirements

Due date: 2/23/2025
Submit to: Shauna Harman, Careerwise Director of Marketing & Communications
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Meredith Vadis, Playbook Strategies LLC
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Format: PDF
Length: Limited to 10 pages/slides or less

Must include:

- Narrative of your team's approach to serving The Center
- Description of prior relevant experience
- Short biographies of each key team member
- Three references (email and phone number + context in which they worked with your team)
- Flat fee monthly retainer (excluding paid advertising budget and optional add-ons such as monitoring tools) for an 8 month period, with the option for Careerwise/The Center to extend services through the end of 2027.
- Any additional fees, expenses or commission assessed or anticipated in addition to retainer and pass through advertising costs
- Examples of past relevant work (earned, owned and paid media)
- Examples of data / metrics your firm uses to demonstrate success in both earned and paid media

Bidder Requirements:

The Center receives federal funding from the US Department of Labor, via the State of Colorado. The successful company should expect to sign a contract that includes pass-down provisions tied to governmental funding. The winning bidder must be a firm

in good standing (not debarred by a government entity), ensure that all of its employees and contractors are legally permitted to work in the United States, and be willing to accept standard government contractual terms which may include audit and insurance requirements, Freedom of Information Act and other similar transparency requirements, and required reporting deadlines.

About the Opportunity

Careerwise has been awarded the contract to operationalize the federally-funded Future Ready Apprenticeship Center (The Center) and seeks an experienced vendor to support its earned, owned and paid media strategy for the Center. Careerwise will closely partner with the State of Colorado in this work. [Read more about it here.](#)

About Careerwise

Established in Colorado in 2016, CareerWise is a national nonprofit committed to bringing youth apprenticeship to all 50 states by 2030, aiming to revitalize the American Dream for a new generation. The organization is actively building a new paradigm for opportunity, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all college model. Leveraging nearly a decade of experience and the success of thousands of youth apprentices, CareerWise modernizes youth apprenticeship and creates equitable career pathways for young people aged 16-24. It achieves this by sharing its expertise with apprenticeship-ready schools and employers, designing education-to-career policy infrastructure, and collaborating with employers on workforce development. A national leader in youth Registered Apprenticeship (RA) opportunities, CareerWise provides best-in-class tools, technology, and consulting. The organization partners with schools and businesses to offer multi-year, paid apprenticeships where high school students earn both high school and college credit. Its extensive national consulting practice demonstrates its expertise in implementing industry sector employer strategies and accelerating RA opportunities, having successfully launched programs in 28 states, including Indiana, New York, and Washington, D.C., in addition to Colorado.

The Center

In a world rapidly transforming, the path to a fulfilling career is evolving. The [Future Ready Apprenticeship Center](#) will create and enhance accessible career pathways for young Americans to thrive in the modern workforce.

The Center's mission is to provide national resource sharing to support employers and governments in establishing youth apprenticeship programs that empower young people (ages 16-24) with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed.

The Center will deliver a lasting positive impact on individuals, communities, and the nation's economy by providing:

- Replicable frameworks and models for partners to easily implement in their home communities;
- Better on-ramps for youth to better ready and connect them to youth apprenticeship opportunities; and
- A strong knowledge base and social fabric for employers to share lessons learned and maximize resources to grow and expand their apprenticeship workforce.

Key Objectives

During its initial four-year grant period, The Center will pursue the following objectives:

- **National Leadership and Advanced State-Level System Building** The Center will serve as a national hub for youth apprenticeship expertise, providing guidance, resources, and technical assistance. It will create infrastructure to form a state-leadership consortia to further knowledge and best practice sharing. Specifically, eight states will receive subcontracts and intensive support through The Center to build and expand registered apprenticeship systems for youth ages 16-24. States will start applying early in 2026 for these competitive awards.
- **Program Development & Technical Assistance:** The Center will build on CareerWise's existing models to further develop and widely share youth apprenticeship models that can be replicated across the country for youth currently in school as well as those who've left an educational setting. This specifically includes comprehensive toolkits for Registered Apprenticeship Programs.
- **Convenings:** The Center will organize and facilitate dozens of virtual and in-person forums & community of practice convenings for consortium states and other partners to share progress, identify opportunities and collaborate to solve challenges. Industry-specific convenings of employers and support will be a major focus area of The Center.
- **Awareness:** The Center will actively build the public awareness, acceptance and knowledge base around registered apprenticeship opportunities for youth as a viable post-highschool pathway. It will also educate employers on how to use youth apprenticeship programs as a high ROI workforce solution via a national communications campaign. The Center website will include free and accessible toolkits and other support to provide new communities and employers with a head start in establishing their youth apprenticeship models. (Website update for Careerwise and The Center is in progress with another vendor and expected to be completed Q1 2026.)
- **Data and Research:** The Center will collect and analyze data on youth apprenticeship outcomes, informing policy and best practices. Specifically, The Center will gather and publicly share existing and emerging data related to 16-24 year-old apprenticeship participation, including comparisons to adult apprentices, demographics, wages, completion rates, geographic location, sponsor type and

return on investment for employers via its data repository. The Center will seek to publicize key reports, findings and other data summaries that can advance public policy & employer participation around youth apprenticeship.

Anticipated Impact

The Center is poised to have a transformative impact on the youth apprenticeship landscape in the United States. By providing national leadership, supporting program development, and ensuring quality, The Center will help to:

- Increase the number and quality of registered youth apprenticeship programs by engaging local governments, educational institutions, and employers
- Expand access to youth apprenticeships and improve on-ramps for youth nationwide
- Improve awareness and understanding of alternative pathways for youth to achieve post-secondary economic success and education
- Improve employment and earnings outcomes for youth apprentices
- Strengthen the talent pipeline for employers
- Support the creation and delivery of state-level plans for expanding registered apprenticeships within and across state boundaries
- Develop a national youth apprenticeship data repository, including evaluatory data of various youth apprenticeship models

Resources & Tools Available

Careerwise currently utilizes the following Marketing, PR and Communications products, which are available to support The Center and the work of the successful bidder:

- Salesforce Sales and Marketing Cloud (not open to using another CRM)
- SEMRUSH (open to using another vendor)
- Wordpress
- Google Analytics
- Prowly

Careerwise is currently redesigning its website to better incorporate The Center and expects that work to conclude in March. Careerwise's web vendor will provide ongoing SEO support.

Careerwise has an in-house marketing team that includes six individuals focused on supporting its executives, website & social media content, graphic design and events planning & execution. This team will support The Center with a portion of their time and will also need to continue to support the ongoing work of Careerwise and its local programs throughout the country. Additionally, The Center and Careerwise contract with

Clash Consulting and Playbook Strategies for marketing, communications, design, and public relations support. At the discretion of Shauna Harman, the winning bidder may at times work at the direction of either the Clash or Playbook team.

Audiences

Primary

- State Policy Makers & Bureaucrats
 - Governors & their appointees such as Commissioner / Secretary of the state agency charged with employment, apprenticeship and/or workforce issues
 - Workforce boards
 - City & County leadership

- Employer Decision-makers, Executive Leaders
 - CEOs, Head of HR/Talent, Chief People Officer
 - C-suite executives who oversee areas where the talent pipeline is insufficient and significant workforce gaps exist

- Industry Groups in critical sectors with high vacancy rates in well-paid positions
 - Healthcare
 - Advanced Manufacturing
 - K-12 School Districts (focus on teacher vacancy rates and school district as an employer)
 - Finance & Banking
 - IT / AI / Tech

Secondary

- K-12 / Post-Secondary Decision-makers, Leaders, Administrators
 - Superintendents, School Boards
 - Administrators who specialize in career pathways for high school students
 - Community, vocational/technical, and four-year colleagues that provide education for apprentices and are sometimes the recipient of tuition reimbursement funds provided to apprentices.

- Intermediaries growing/starting youth apprenticeship programs and pathway programming

Scope of Work

The successful respondent will create, refine and execute on a variety of strategies to meet The Center's goals and to enhance and expand the brand and reputation of The Center.

Most Important Tasks

Delineated below is a longer list of tasks the successful respondent will engage in during the scope of this engagement. The most important among that list include:

1. Respondent pitches earned media on behalf of The Center and continually seeks to use its relationships to expand earned media coverage & executive visibility.
2. Respondent guides and supports The Center in using tools and methods to enhance its profile and visibility with key audiences and can measure success in those efforts.
3. Respondent plays a critical role in strategy refinement & implementation of earned, owned and paid media plans around The Center.

Earned and owned media

- Create &/or refine The Center earned and owned media narrative arc, big picture strategy & messaging. Utilize feedback from Careerwise staff and Marcomms consultants (Clash Consulting & Playbook Strategies) to further refine strategy.
 - The Center's goal is to use earned/owned media to expand awareness of youth apprenticeship with employers and to drive conversions from awareness to apprenticeship program creation.
- Recommend, create and/or support owned media content
- Maintain relationships with journalists interested in relevant topical areas (e.g. workforce shortages in critical sectors, higher education policy, apprenticeship models, pathways to well-paying careers, etc) & pitch journalists as potential stories, announcements and other newsworthy issues are identified.
- Support Careerwise in 'newsjacking' other narratives to ensure inclusion of youth apprenticeship in a wider variety of earned media outlets
- Advise on AI optimization of website and social media content
- Create and help implement strategies to elevate thought leadership originating from The Center & its key officials

Paid opportunities

- Consistent with approved strategy and message, provide concepts for Careerwise to design creative assets for online advertising & create landing pages to capture click thru and form completion in Salesforce Marketing Cloud
- Identify high-profile speaking opportunities for Careerwise / The Center leadership and pitch leaders to event organizers.

- Careerwise expects to have limited paid media dollars across online advertising, paid speaking arrangements, and other opportunities. To best utilize that budget, the successful respondent may be asked to provide:
 - Complete low-cost AB comparisons of creative prior to full-scale launch
 - Day-to-day Management of paid media campaigns to maximize outcome and minimize expense
 - Track & report conversion metrics at a regular cadence
 - Develop and refine targeting to achieve audience goals with respect to geography, role, and industry sector

Knowledge, skills and abilities desired

Careerwise seeks a firm with the following attributes among its team members. Careerwise does not expect to utilize all of these skillsets heavily, but on occasion would like to access the in-house expert for advice and limited implementation assistance.

- Expert knowledge of keyword / SEO & AI optimization of website and ad content
- Experience with traditional earned media in the following geographies and industries:
 - Industries: Healthcare, K-12 education employers, advanced manufacturing, IT
 - States: TBD (will definitely include NY and CO)
- Experience with new & non-traditional media utilized by employers/executive decision makers in the above mentioned industries
- Experience negotiating and buying sponsorship packages with key industry partner organizations
- Expert knowledge of Salesforce Marketing Cloud
- Ability to geofence and hypertarget online advertising