



# Request for Proposal (RFP) for Communications & Storytelling Partner

Issued By: Samuel Fels Fund

Contact: Uma Viswanathan [info@samfels.org](mailto:info@samfels.org);

## Submission Instructions

**Meet & Greet:** We'd like to meet you along the way, to see if there is a mutual fit.

[Sign up here for a 30-minute conversation on Thursday, March 5.](#) and come with your questions.

**Proposal Deadline:** Please submit your proposal via email to Uma Viswanathan ([info@samfels.org](mailto:info@samfels.org)) no later than **5PM EST Monday, March 16, 2026.**

## About Samuel S. Fels Fund

The Samuel S. Fels Fund is a Philadelphia-based philanthropic foundation committed to strengthening movements, leaders, and communities working toward a more just and inclusive civic ecosystem. We are a values-driven, place-based funder with a long history in Philadelphia and a growing focus on movement building, particularly supporting the leadership, wellbeing, and ecosystem health of the city's grassroots movement leaders.

We are living in a time of significant civic, social, and political churn, when the work of supporting movements matters more than ever. In this context, Fels has an opportunity to learn how to use our voice as a movement funder, to add legitimacy and legibility to our partners' work, and to help other funders and broader audiences better understand how movements function, evolve, and generate change.

For us, storytelling is not about institutional visibility for its own sake. It is a way to support movements by making their work more intelligible, investable, and responsibly engaged, especially by those who have never been close to movement work before.

To act on this opportunity, Fels is, for the first time, building a communications and storytelling capacity. We are seeking a partner who can help us discover how to express our voice as a movement funder and use our influence with care and intention, by guiding strategic direction through active implementation.

## Purpose of the Engagement

Fels seeks a communications and storytelling partner to help build and operate a clear, credible, and resilient communications function in service of our mission and ecosystem role. This work will support Fels to:

- make its learning visible and legible;
- support and amplify movement partners with care, integrity, and respect for community-led work;
- express a clear, grounded public voice; and
- strengthen ecosystem-level influence aligned with our values and strategy.

This engagement is intentionally designed as a learning-by-doing effort. While this partner will help guide strategic direction, we expect strategy to be shaped through active implementation, experimentation, iteration and reflection.

## Role & Core Responsibilities

The selected partner will function as Fels' external communications team, providing both strategic leadership and day-to-day execution in close partnership with the Fels President.

**Fels is open to proposals from both individuals and firms**, provided there is a clearly accountable lead who will serve as our primary partner throughout the engagement.

This engagement is scoped for depth, judgment, and coherence rather than volume. We are seeking a senior-led partner able to exercise discernment about where communications effort will have the greatest strategic value.

### Core responsibilities include:

- serving as Fels' primary communications function;
- leading narrative framing and communications strategy as it emerges through practice, reflection, and iteration
- sourcing opportunities for Fels thought leadership and influence
- implementing and managing communications across channels, including website;
- developing and executing content and storytelling;
- translating learning and evaluation into public-facing narratives, in partnership with Fels' external evaluation partner;
- managing inbound media inquiries and selective proactive placements;
- supporting leadership during sensitive or reputational moments;
- ensuring coherence across platforms and audiences;
- collaborating closely with staff to strengthen internal communications capacity over time
- coordinating and leveraging insights from an advisory group comprised of select grantees, Board members, and other relevant partners

Early in the engagement, the partner will lead a period of discovery and orientation to ground this work in Fels' context, priorities, and values.

## **Learning Orientation**

This engagement is guided by a set of core learning questions that will shape storytelling priorities, experimentation, and reflection throughout the year. These questions may evolve over time and are intended to help Fels discover how to use its voice responsibly and effectively as a movement funder.

*We're not just telling stories about movements. We're helping people learn how to see movements.*

### **Initial learning questions include:**

- How are movements organizing, collaborating, and moving right now? What makes for effective storytelling that helps people see themselves as part of movements?
- Why does Philadelphia matter as a place to invest in movements at this moment?
- What does it look like for funders to use our voice with responsibility, solidarity, and courage?
- What does trust-based philanthropy look like in practice, beyond general operating support? What more becomes possible when funders invest in leadership, wellbeing, and care for the humans doing the work?
- What storytelling forms, mediums, and channels most effectively deepen understanding and invite engagement today?

## **Scope of Work (Illustrative)**

The responsibilities below describe the range of work this partner may support. Priorities, cadence, and focus areas will be set collaboratively and revisited over time.

### **Storytelling & Content** (visuals, audio, and written)

- Essays, profiles, reflections, and case examples
- Light multimedia storytelling
- Grantee- and ecosystem-centered narratives
- Support for internal storybanking practices

### **Thought Leadership & Influence**

- Selective thought leadership opportunities, including op-eds, essays, and convenings
- Careful positioning of Fels as a learning partner and civic actor
- Proactive and responsive media engagement, including inquiry management

### **Digital & Platforms**

- Editorial leadership for website, newsletters, and digital channels
- Light social media strategy and execution
- Cross-channel coherence and voice
- Monitoring and hands-on communications support during high-risk moments, with agreed-upon response protocols

### **Learning & Reflection**

- Ongoing sensemaking with leadership
- Integration of evaluation and learning into storytelling
- Periodic reflection on narrative impact
- Input into future planning, as appropriate

### **Optional Work (Scoped Collaboratively)**

- Brand refinement
- Website redesign

Any optional work would be scoped collaboratively and aligned with the overall budget.

## Working Style & Partnership Expectations

We are seeking a partner who brings:

- high judgment and low ego;
- comfort working with ambiguity, emergence, and complexity;
- respect for movement dynamics and community trust
- ability to work with humility, cultural fluency, and respect across difference, particularly in movement and community-rooted contexts
- ability to support both strategy and execution; and
- a collaborative posture that strengthens our organization's internal capacity.

## Budget & Timeline

The total budget for this engagement is **up to \$80,000**, inclusive of all labor, subcontractors, design, production, travel, and expenses **for a 12-month engagement**.

Proposals should demonstrate how the firm would:

- operate as Fels' communications partner within this budget,
- prioritize work for maximum strategic value, and
- make thoughtful decisions as opportunities or additional needs arise.

## What Success Looks Like

By the end of the engagement:

- Fels has a clearer, more confident, and coherent public voice;
- learning is visible and legible beyond our internal audiences;
- grantee and ecosystem stories are elevated with care and consent;
- Fels has internal alignment that supports clear, confident external communication
- communications functions as durable infrastructure, supporting clarity and alignment.
- broader audiences demonstrate increased understanding of what movements are, how they operate, and why this moment in Philadelphia matters.

# Proposal Submission Questions

We invite interested individuals and firms to submit **a concise proposal** responding to the questions below. We value clarity of thinking, evidence of practice, and sound judgment over polished marketing materials. Please include **two work samples** that best demonstrate your communications strategy, execution, or storytelling approach. Please briefly note your role in the work and why each sample is relevant.

We have a strong preference for **Philadelphia-based firms**, or firms with deep experience and trusted relationships within Philadelphia's civic, nonprofit, and philanthropic ecosystems. We are especially interested in partners who see communications and storytelling as a tool for learning, sense-making, and education, not just messaging or promotion.

## 1. Understanding of Fels and the Communications Opportunity

Please describe your understanding of:

- Fels' role as a place-based philanthropic foundation in Philadelphia, and
- the purpose of this communications and storytelling engagement.

We are particularly interested in how you interpret this moment as an opportunity for Fels to learn how to use its voice as a movement funder, and to help broader audiences better understand movements and their work.

## 2. Communications Strategy & Approach

Describe your approach to communications strategy and execution. In your response, please address:

- how you assess communications needs and priorities when formal capacity is limited,
- how you determine where to focus effort early on, and
- how strategy evolves through implementation, experimentation, and learning over time.

We are interested in how you think about communications in conditions of ambiguity, not just what you produce.

## 3. Effectiveness and Learning

Please share one or two examples of communications or storytelling work you led that helped shift understanding, clarify complexity, or educate an audience. For each example, briefly describe:

- the context and learning goal,
- the approach and tactics used,
- how you assessed whether the work was resonating or confusing, and

- how what you learned shaped what you did next.

Examples may include campaigns, narrative shifts, media engagement, thought leadership, or sustained communications efforts.

#### **4. Storytelling with Judgment and Trust**

Fels is committed to storytelling that is careful, additive, and grounded in trust with partners. Please describe a situation where:

- your storytelling work needed to educate or reframe understanding (rather than simply highlight activity), and;
- power dynamics, consent, or real risks shaped your approach.

What guided your decisions, and what did you learn?

#### **5. Operating as Fels' Communications Team**

This engagement is designed for an individual or firm to function as Fels' communications partner within an **\$80,000 all-inclusive budget**. Please describe:

- who would serve as the primary accountable lead,
- how you balance hands-on execution with reflection and learning, and
- how you make prioritization decisions when capacity, time, or risk is constrained.

#### **6. Team, Philadelphia Experience & References**

Please include:

- the primary individuals who would work on this engagement and their roles,
- relevant experience working in Philadelphia and/or with philanthropic, nonprofit, or movement-based organizations, and
- 2-3 references who can speak to your communications effectiveness, judgment, and ability to learn and adapt in complex contexts.