Online Education and Community Revamp

Phase 1

Request for Qualifications

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Project Overview

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) seeks to partner with an outstanding consultant who will guide us through the first phase of a process to significantly evolve our online educational programming and refine our approach to online community-building in the higher education sector.

At IFYC, we partner with hundreds of colleges and universities across the U.S. to turn religious and non-religious diversity into a positive force in our society. (Learn more about our mission and strategic plan in Appendix 1.)

In addition to in-person events and conferences, we offer several online programs and communities on various platforms, detailed below. We've spent much of this year taking stock of these resources and our online efforts to date and have determined that this is the right time to thoughtfully consider opportunities and risks to scaling up our programming in this area.

For Phase 1 of this project, we are seeking an expert partner to help us discern:

What is the correct assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats when it comes to the energy and resources we dedicate to online learning and communities?

What is IFYC's optimal approach to achieving impact by transferring knowledge to college and university students, staff, and faculty through online means? What is the optimal approach to forming corresponding online communities to keep them engaged with these ideas?

This will set us up to then answer: **What actions need to occur to envision, build, and deliver more effective online learning/community programs ahead of the 2018-2019 academic year, on what timeline?**

We're looking for someone to lead us through a process of reflection and discovery grounded in both 1) the realities of IFYC's programs, audience sizes/appetites, and tech assets and 2) an understanding of the ways that peer/competitor networks are operating in these spaces. We hope to be able to move quickly from there, finalizing our strategy and timeline for continued success in 2018. Following a successful engagement, there is the potential for continued partnership. Whereas Phase 1 focuses on auditing, assessing, and outlining the road potential paths forward, Phase 2 *may* focus on implementation or improvement of processes. The scope and necessity of Phase 2 will be determined by the outcomes of Phase 1.

An effective consultant or team will have solid insight into higher education as a "market," from Gen Z incoming freshmen to deans and provosts; a firm grasp of both the latest trends and enduring best practices for delivering educational content online; and experience moderating and growing vibrant, successful online communities. They'll also be tech tool-agnostic.

The total budget for Phases 1 and 2 of this project is $25,000. Phase 1 will take place **summer-fall 2017**.

In lieu of a full-on proposal process, we request brief overviews of qualifications from interested teams by **Thursday, July 6**. We will explore partnership directly with those whose submissions we find compelling. More details can be found on pages 4-5.

Project Context

IFYC History

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) was founded in 1998 by young people who believed that American society is stronger when people of all different worldviews have the skills and knowledge necessary to work together. In 2009, we concluded that the best way to have a sustained impact would be to focus our programs on higher education, helping that sector model interfaith cooperation as a social norm and graduate a critical mass of young interfaith leaders with the knowledgebase and skill set to move society in that direction.

In-person events – such as Interfaith Leadership Institutes for students, consulting packages and coaching for campus staff and administrators, and faculty conferences to help advance the emerging field of Interfaith Studies – have been key drivers of this impact. These have been very successful, and we are looking to scale and more intentionally bring our educational programming and community-building online.

Given local, national, and global events, this is a critical time to be developing emerging leaders who can advance interfaith cooperation in the United States. Our work has helped medical students interact more sensitively with patients of different religious backgrounds. We've supported Christian-affiliated campuses as they work to welcome and accommodate waves of international students who are not Christian. We give grants to faculty members who then develop courses exploring diplomacy, business, education, and many other disciplines through an interfaith lens. The list goes on, the work is vital, and the potential to scale is huge.

Snapshot: Online Learning, 2015-2017

Over the past two years, we have dedicated extensive staff time to online learning – from producing a highly polished Blended Learning Curriculum for use in college classrooms, to hosting 14 public webinars last academic year and 30 this year. (Breakdown in Appendix 2.)

We continue to work to position ourselves as conveners of, and good partners to, those working and studying in higher education. Increasingly, online curricula and programs have served as important collaboration opportunities with partner organizations, campuses, and funders.

Snapshot: Current Online Communities

IFYC's General Social Media

IFYC has brand accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. We also have Twitter accounts for our Executive Director and our alumni programs.

Online Groups

We have a number of decentralized online communities, most of which are invitation only as dictated by various program goals. Most are on Facebook, though we're increasingly using Slack to work with students and Google Groups with faculty and campus staff. The groups have varying degrees of activity and require different levels of community management/moderation.

Moving Forward

In spring 2015, IFYC finalized a new five year business plan. (See Appendix 1 for more on our strategy and a breakdown of our five major audiences within the higher ed space.)

We're also rolling out a new brand identity and launching a new website this summer. These will help demonstrate that interfaith cooperation matters in and beyond college, and we need our online communities, courses, and trainings to help us authentically back that up. And we need to do this in a way that is as sustainable as possible as technology changes rapidly.

A successful consultant on Phase 1 will help us answer the questions on page 1 above by digging into the assessment we've done so far, listening to our constituents, and providing specific recommendations around what changes to make as well as guidance on successfully introducing them to our market.

An *outstanding* consultant – one we'll be thrilled to recommend to others in the future, and will happily consider partnering with on subsequent phases of this project – will do all of this with some distinctly IFYC needs and values in mind:

- We bring people together. At our in person events, we create inspiring opportunities that foster lasting relationships; validate the importance and power of interfaith cooperation; transmit useful skills; and include/accommodate many identities and learning styles. We've built a loyal and enthusiastic community this way, and we want our online programs and spaces to inspire similar loyalty and enthusiasm.
- We value the partnership, trust, and insights of people and organizations in our sector. It's important that our audiences see IFYC working with people and institutions collaboratively – that we lift up their perspectives, experience, and expertise in the field and don't imply we have all the answers.
- We steward resources with conviction. As stated above, we have spent a good deal of staff time, energy, and money adopting Salesforce as our CRM (2015) and adopting both Adobe Connect and Skype for Business (2016). If we adopt new Learning Management Systems, online community platforms, or other tools, it's essential that we do these in ways that allow us to seamlessly track participation data, communicate with stakeholders, and ideally do not require onerous training time for our staff. (That said, we do not have the expectation that we'll make final tech decisions during Phase 1 of this project, and we are looking for a consultant who will be agnostic about tech tools.)

Project Scope & Deliverables

IFYC envisions a project process and timeline as follows, but understand that the firm or consultant may have suggestions and adjustments will likely be needed. We do ask that the consultant meet with our team in person in Chicago two to three times during the process, and have budgeted for travel costs accordingly.

- Contract and Statement of Work, including payment schedule, signed by August 4
- Part 1: Initial Discovery Phase
  - May include review of IFYC materials, stats and feedback from previous/existing programs, market research, focus groups or interviews

- o If helpful, consultant is invited to observe Interfaith Leadership Institute, Aug 11-13 (travel costs covered by IFYC)
  - o May culminate in a discovery brief summarizing learnings so far
- Part 2: Deeper Audit/Assessment
  - o IFYC digests and provides feedback and/or validation to the initial discovery phase, then provides additional information or introductions as needed
- Part 3: Potential Paths Forward
  - o Once the results of Part 2 have been digested and validated, Consultant develops and presents initial recommendations for potential strategic paths forward

We acknowledge that the consultant's preferred approach and process might differ from the one we've sketched here, and are open to proceeding on a different plan as proposed by the consultant. However, **we'd like to wrap Phase 1 by mid-October**.

Submission Requirements

Submissions are **due by July 6**. IFYC is *not* asking for a full-on proposal at this stage. Rather, we'd like to see brief and personalized overviews of qualified consultants' relevant experience, approach/methodology, and (if applicable) teams. After reviewing initial responses to this RFQ, IFYC will reach out to a selected small group of finalists for further conversation.

Successful submissions must include the following:

- A brief description of you/your firm and your approach to client engagements of this nature, including discovery and research; connecting objectives to proposed strategies and tactics; and creating educational experiences, architecture for online programs, and supporting systems.
- Short (two page max) narrative of why you are qualified to take on this project. This should reflect your relevant work with higher ed and/or nonprofits, your understanding of the latest pedagogies and methodologies in online learning and community building, and why your clients have consistently succeeded in these areas.
- At least two relevant case studies with client references (IFYC will contact you before reaching out to any references).
- Brief bios of the principal staff person(s) who will work on this project, including roles, responsibilities, and client history.

Brief, crisp responses are appreciated. Please feel free to include any additional content as a supplemental appendix.

If you're interested and plan to submit a response to this RFQ, we'd appreciate a quick heads up. If possible, please let Julia Smith know if you'll be submitting by **COB June 23** so we can plan our review time accordingly: julia@ifyc.org.

Thank you. We look forward to your response!

Appendix 1: IFYC's Strategic Plan and Audiences

In spring 2015, IFYC finalized a new five year business plan titled "Impact 2020." The plan defines a strategy that focuses on three levers of social change that have been pivotal in most social movements: leaders, environments, and knowledge. Our programs empower **leaders** at all levels of a campus, building **knowledge** of interfaith cooperation, and helping campuses to create **environments** that model excellent interfaith cooperation.
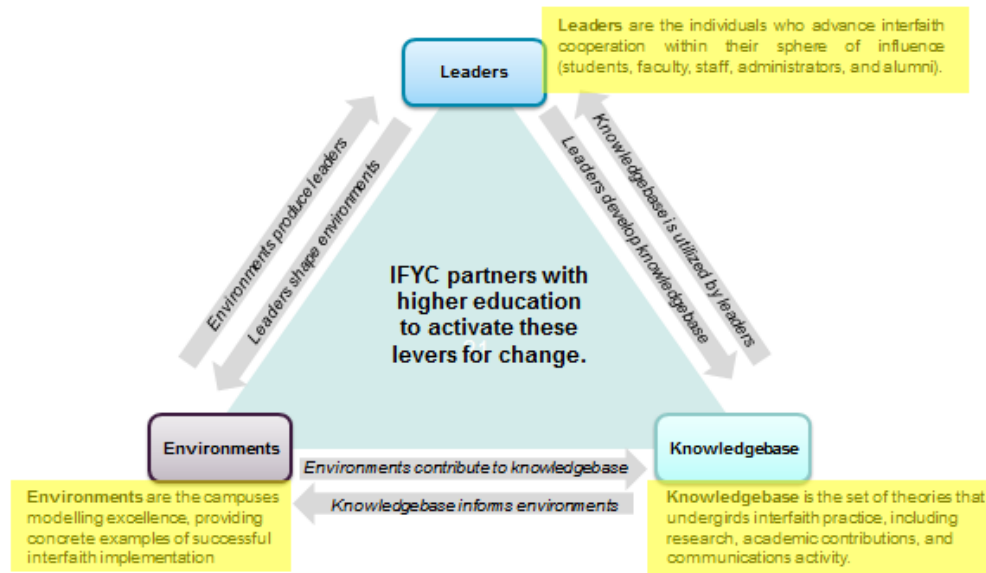
Our online courses, events, and communities must appeal to our audiences and help mutually reinforce and pull these three levers of change. Target audiences break down as follows:

- **Students** – we want them to become interfaith leaders
- **Alumni** – after students who've participated in our programs graduate, we want to help place them in targeted sectors, and support them as they bring interfaith leadership skills to those sectors
- **Staff/Student Affairs** – we want them to create sustainable interfaith programs on campus
- **Faculty** – we want them to teach key concepts of interfaith cooperation
- **Campus Administrators** – we want them to embed interfaith cooperation into their campus values and foster investments in interfaith from the top down

Also in 2015, we published an article on Leadership Practices for Interfaith Excellence in Higher Education, which guides much of our programmatic and educational thinking and content.

Appendix 2: Online Education Efforts, 2015-2017

Webinars and Virtual Learning Communities

2014-2015 fiscal/academic year

- Offered several webinars via a platform called ClickMeeting as a way to both generate new, in-scope leads, and to "meet community members where they are." Topics included Interfaith Cooperation 101, early findings from our survey research, and more. Typically did not include guest speakers beyond our staff.

2015-2016 fiscal/academic year

- Delivered 14 public webinars and several others that were by invitation only (sometimes due to partnerships, other times due to program goals). Began including guest speakers more frequently. Highlights included a webinar about combating Islamophobia which drew more than 400 registrations, as well as a four-part spring series that attracted 300+ campus educators seeking professional development, and rewarded those who attended all four sessions with an e-certificate.
- Dissatisfied with the customer service and other limitations of ClickMeeting, and recognizing that the volume had grown significantly, selected a new platform for webinar delivery.
- Hired Caption Access to provide live transcripts of webinars and developed a more earnest system for tracking RSVP/attendance numbers in Salesforce.
- Standardized a 10-question follow-up survey for every webinar.

2016-2017 fiscal/academic year (underway now)

- Will have offered 30 total webinars by the end of this year, including several multi-session series. Experienced a downturn in attendance in the fall, leading some program stakeholders to cut back on the number of webinars they are planning for next year.
- Began paying some of our guest speakers for their time and contributions.
- Transitioned webinars to Adobe Connect. Small virtual learning groups are also taking place on Skype for Business.
- Began loading all webinars into Salesforce as Campaigns, allowing for better email tracking. Also began consistently tracking which marketing tactics work best for which webinars.
- Adopted a new closed caption system to ensure our webinars are accessible to more audience members.

Blended Learning Curriculum

2014-2015:

- In partnership with a nearby university, IFYC produced an [eight-lesson course](#) consisting of video modules, suggested readings, activities, discussion questions, and assessments.

- Faculty may download materials for use exclusively in their own classrooms, or connect their students with others across the country via Dominican University's Canvas site.
- The course materials are available for free, though we require faculty to let us know how they will be used, and to give us feedback.

2016-2017:

- 30+ faculty from across the country used the BLCIL in their classrooms
- Based on complaints that the Dominican University site made the curriculum cumbersome to access, worked with our web development team to make the entire curriculum available on our website as well.

Appendix 3: Breakdown of Current/Existing Online Communities

Facebook

- Our alumni team maintains a fairly active and 700+ member Facebook group.
- We have a 300+ member group for Campus Educators that is fairly quiet
- We "co-own" a 850 member group of educators, administrators, and students that is a remnant of a former annual major national event we used to co-host
- We have a moderately active, closed, 50+ member group for contributors to our digital magazine.
- Our Student Leadership team has made ad hoc Facebook groups for small committees of students who are collaborating on campaigns together, and for conference cohort groups over the past few years. These tend to have higher levels of engagement in the days immediately before and after big national events/campaigns.

Google Groups

- Our Academic Initiatives team sometimes sets up Google Groups for the faculty who attend our in-person conferences as a way to share syllabi and documents. These are mostly used in the days of and immediately before/after events, then fade.
- Our Assessment Team plans to use Google Group for a 10-person cohort that kicks off with a "boot camp" this summer, then continues with monthly touchpoints and asynchronous forums throughout the coming academic year.

Slack Channels

- Our Student Leadership team has experimented with Slack this year for small group collaboration and plans to use it for our national student network in 2017-2018.