

Best Practices and Recommendations

To inform the Downtown Development Board's (DDB) consideration of engaging a professional marketing and public relations firm, staff reviewed comparable solicitations and marketing models from Florida Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs), Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs)—including West Palm Beach, Miami, Winter Haven, Wilton Manors, Opa-locka, and Lake Worth Beach.

Several best practices and lessons emerged that the DDB should consider in shaping its approach:

- **Integrate Branding and Economic Development Messaging**

Both the **West Palm Beach DDA** and **Miami DDA** demonstrate the value of connecting marketing and branding directly to downtown economic development objectives. Their campaigns—such as Miami's "*Follow the Sun*" business recruitment platform and West Palm's "*Downtown Works*" narrative—use branding to attract investors, residents, and visitors while promoting redevelopment opportunities. For Clearwater, this means ensuring the marketing firm's scope explicitly aligns creative messaging with the DDB's broader goals to stimulate investment, support small businesses, and drive visitation.

- **Establish Clear Brand Identity and Storytelling Frameworks**

Peer downtowns maintain comprehensive brand systems that unify their communications. Miami DDA's internal marketing team and outside PR partner (Schwartz Media Strategies) coordinate visual identity, media relations, and digital storytelling. Similarly, West Palm Beach's DDA maintains brand guidelines to ensure consistent messaging across events, digital media, and business attraction materials.

The DDB should require its selected firm to deliver a brand toolkit, including visual standards, messaging pillars, and tone guidelines, for use by both DDB and CRA staff.

- **Maintain an Active, Measurable Social Media Strategy**

West Palm Beach DDA integrates social listening and analytics tools (e.g., Meltwater) to track audience engagement and adjust campaigns in real time. Likewise, Wilton Manors requires its contractor to provide a monthly social media calendar with performance metrics. Incorporating this level of data reporting will help the DDB ensure accountability and track measurable progress toward increased engagement and awareness.

- **Provide Flexibility Through Optional Services**

Miami DDA's and Lake Worth Beach CRA's marketing contracts include optional services—such as crisis communications, event-specific promotions, and influencer engagement—that can be activated as needed. This model allows districts to respond to emerging opportunities without renegotiating the full scope of services.

The DDB should include similar flexibility by allowing proposers to submit optional pricing for additional or as-needed services.

- **Use a Weighted Evaluation Matrix for Transparency**

To ensure fair and defensible selection, West Palm Beach and Miami use structured evaluation matrices that balance experience, creative quality, approach, and cost. The DDB should adopt a similar transparent scoring process, with evaluation criteria published in the solicitation.

- **Require Defined Deliverables and Regular Reporting**
 Winter Haven and New Port Richey include specific deliverables—such as brand toolkits, quarterly dashboards, and campaign summaries—to maintain performance accountability. For Clearwater, establishing a clear schedule of deliverables and performance reports (e.g., quarterly dashboards with KPIs) will enable data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement.
- **Consider a Continuing Services or Vendor Pool Model**
 Some agencies, such as Winter Haven, have implemented a continuing services or vendor pool structure that allows them to issue task orders for distinct projects under one master agreement. If multiple City or CRA departments will benefit from marketing and communications services, the DDB may wish to explore this model for long-term efficiency.
- **Coordinate Messaging Across Agencies and Partners**
 Miami and West Palm Beach have shown that unified messaging across city departments, DDAs, and partner organizations amplifies impact. A shared marketing calendar and content strategy can prevent duplication and strengthen brand consistency. For Clearwater, joint coordination between the DDB and CRA will be critical to ensuring consistent messaging about downtown projects, public events, and redevelopment milestones.
- **Implement a Robust Performance Measurement Framework**
 Leading agencies use quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to track the return on marketing investments. Common metrics include media impressions, website traffic, social media engagement, pedestrian counts, and merchant feedback. The DDB should require its selected firm to report these KPIs quarterly and present annual performance summaries to the Board to demonstrate transparency and value.