



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

It's the Water. It's the _____.

A Grassroots Community Pride Initiative

Issued by: Experience Olympia & Beyond

Project Budget: About \$30,000 to \$50,000

1. Project Overview

Experience Olympia & Beyond (EOB) invites qualified creative firms to submit proposals for the development of a grassroots community pride initiative rooted in one of our region's most recognizable expressions of identity: **"It's the Water."**

Our vision is to build upon this established sense of place by creating a flexible, community-owned platform: **"It's the _____."**

"It's the Water" serves as the foundation and unifying regional identity. "It's the _____." extends that identity, inviting residents, businesses, and individual communities to celebrate the people, places, traditions, and experiences that make Thurston County special to them.

We are not seeking a traditional marketing campaign or a replacement for our existing destination brand. Instead, we want to create a recognizable, accessible expression of regional pride that people can personalize, share, and make their own.

The goal is to create something that feels genuinely grassroots, grows through authentic participation, and becomes part of how our communities celebrate themselves.

2. About Experience Olympia & Beyond

Experience Olympia & Beyond (EOB) is the official destination marketing organization for Thurston County, Washington. As a nonprofit organization, we work to strengthen our region's visitor economy by inspiring travel, supporting local businesses, and showcasing the people, places, and experiences that make our communities extraordinary.

Our work extends beyond traditional tourism promotion. Through strategic marketing, community partnerships, research, and destination development, we help create economic opportunities while supporting the quality of life that makes Thurston County a wonderful place to live, work, and visit.

We collaborate with local governments, businesses, community organizations, and residents throughout the region to advance a shared vision for Thurston County's future. Our approach recognizes that a thriving destination begins with a thriving community, and that residents are among our greatest storytellers and ambassadors.

This grassroots community pride initiative reflects our commitment to strengthening local identity, celebrating authentic stories, and fostering connections between the communities we serve.

Website: <https://www.experienceolympia.com>

Learn more about our organization: <https://www.experienceolympia.com/who-we-are/>

3. Creative Framework: One Shared Identity, Endless Expressions

The initiative should establish a clear relationship between two complementary elements:



It's the Water.

Our shared regional identity.

This is the anchor. It represents the history, character, and collective identity of our region. It should remain recognizable and provide the connective thread across the initiative.

It's the ____.

Your community. Your story. Your expression.

This is the invitation. It allows individuals, businesses, neighborhoods, and communities to define what makes their particular corner of Thurston County meaningful.

The creative approach should explore how these two expressions work together visually and verbally, maintaining a recognizable regional connection while allowing flexibility for individual interpretation. The intent is not to require every community to adopt the same message. It is to create a shared platform that celebrates what makes each community distinct.

4. Creative Development Expectations

The selected agency will be responsible for developing a cohesive identity system that:

- Establishes "It's the Water" as the lead expression of regional identity.
- Incorporates "It's the ____." as a complementary, customizable expression.
- Creates a recognizable visual relationship between the two.
- Allows for individual and community-specific adaptations without diluting the overarching identity.
- Makes participation easy for residents, businesses, and organizations.
- Feels authentic and community-owned rather than institutional or promotional.
- Can evolve organically as people contribute their own expressions of pride.

The proposed creative system should demonstrate how the identity could appear across different communities, settings, and applications while maintaining a clear connection to "It's the Water."

5. Our Ambition

We want people across Thurston County to recognize themselves in a shared regional identity without losing what makes their individual businesses, communities or personhood so unique.

The opportunity is to connect us through something familiar while leaving room for personal expression, local personality, and a little playfulness.

We envision an initiative that EOB helps establish, but that residents and community partners ultimately bring to life.

"It's the Water" connects us. "It's the ____." makes it personal.

6. Guiding Principles

The following principles should inform the strategy, creative development, and recommended implementation approach.

Community-led, not institution-led.

EOB may initiate and steward the work, but the community should become its most visible voice.

Authentic, not manufactured.

We want to celebrate real experiences, stories, and identities rather than invent messaging for people to repeat.

Invitational, not promotional.



Participation should feel like an opportunity for self-expression, not a request to promote the region.

Flexible, not prescriptive.

The creative system should encourage individual interpretation and community-specific adaptations while maintaining a connection to “It’s the Water.”

Organic, not orchestrated.

We want participation to grow through genuine enthusiasm, trusted relationships, and everyday community interactions rather than relying on paid advertising.

Playful, not precious.

The creative platform should welcome personality, humor, and unexpected expressions of local character. It should not feel overly polished, institutional, or rigid.

Enduring, not episodic.

This initiative should become a lasting expression of community identity rather than a short-term marketing effort.

7. Budget

The total anticipated investment for this project is **\$30,000 to \$50,000**, inclusive of all professional fees and costs associated with the agreed-upon scope of work.

Respondents should provide an itemized budget organized by project phase and major deliverable.

Proposals should clearly distinguish:

- Core deliverables included in the proposed fee.
- Optional services or enhancements.
- Potential third-party expenses, software subscriptions, hosting, or ongoing maintenance costs.
- Recommended services or activities that EOB staff could reasonably implement internally.
- Any assumptions or exclusions affecting the total project investment.

EOB encourages respondents to propose practical, creative approaches that maximize community impact within the available budget.

8. Proposal Requirements

Interested firms should submit a proposal containing the following information.

A. Firm Qualifications

- Brief overview of the firm and its relevant expertise.
- Experience in place branding, community identity, civic pride, grassroots engagement, or related creative initiatives.
- Identification of the proposed project team and primary point of contact.

B. Relevant Experience

Provide two to three examples of comparable work, including:

- Project objectives and intended audiences.
- Creative approach and engagement strategy.
- Final deliverables and applications.
- Evidence of community participation, adoption, or measurable results where available.



Experience developing flexible identity systems or initiatives adopted by multiple communities or stakeholder groups is especially relevant.

C. Proposed Approach

Describe your understanding of the project and your proposed methodology for:

- Discovery and creative strategy.
- Integrating “It’s the Water” and “It’s the _____.”
- Visual identity and toolkit development.
- Digital hub design and development.
- Grassroots introduction and ongoing community adoption.

Respondents should also address the following question: **How would you create something residents and businesses want to adopt voluntarily, without it feeling like a traditional marketing initiative led by a destination marketing organization?**

D. Project Timeline

Provide a proposed schedule identifying:

- Major phases and milestones.
- Anticipated opportunities for EOB review and approval.
- Key decisions or dependencies.
- Estimated project completion and readiness for community introduction.

E. Project Budget

Provide an itemized budget by phase and major deliverable, including any proposed optional services.

F. References

Provide contact information for two recent clients with relevant projects.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Evaluation Category	Weight
Creative approach, originality, and understanding of project vision	25%
Community ownership, authenticity, and grassroots adoption strategy	25%
Relevant experience and demonstrated results	20%
Project approach, feasibility, and timeline	15%
Value and alignment with available budget	15%
Total	100%

EOB may request interviews, presentations, or additional information from shortlisted firms before selecting a partner.

Selection will be based on overall qualifications, proposed approach, creative thinking, and value rather than price alone.



10. Anticipated Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFP issued	October 26, 2026
Questions due	November 9, 2026
Proposals due	November 16, 2026
Vendor selection	November 30, 2026
Project kickoff	January 2027

Respondents should identify a realistic project schedule and anticipated milestones within their proposals.

11. Submission Instructions

Please submit proposals electronically in PDF format to:

Shauna Stewart
Experience Olympia & Beyond
shaunas@experienceolympia.com

Subject Line: Community Pride Initiative RFP Submission

Proposals must be received by 5 PM on November 16, 2026. Questions regarding this RFP should be submitted in writing by the stated deadline. Responses to substantive questions may be distributed to all participating firms to ensure a fair and consistent process.

12. Terms and Conditions

- EOB reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, request clarification, negotiate scope and fees, or cancel this solicitation.
- Please disclose any known conflicts of interest
- All costs associated with preparing and submitting proposals are the responsibility of the respondent.
- Issuance of this RFP does not obligate EOB to enter into a contract.
- Final scope, deliverables, schedule, and payment terms will be established through a written agreement.
- The selected firm must disclose any anticipated third-party licensing restrictions or ongoing costs.
- EOB expects ownership of final approved, newly created identity assets and sufficient intellectual property rights to permit their reproduction, customization, and distribution for authorized community use. Ownership of preexisting intellectual property will remain subject to applicable rights and agreements.
- The selected firm will be expected to identify any relevant permissions or usage restrictions associated with the proposed use of "It's the Water."
- Digital deliverables must meet mutually agreed accessibility, security, and technical requirements.
- EOB will require the selected firm to provide evidence of applicable business licensing and insurance coverage.
- Final contractual requirements may include confidentiality, termination provisions, and other standard conditions.