



RFP 21-078 Technical Proposal

Resilient Springfield Outreach/Communications Consultant

City of Springfield, Massachusetts

December 22, 2020

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Letter of Interest

December 22, 2020

Hi Lauren and the Springfield team,

We're excited at the possibility of working with the City of Springfield on your strategic resilient communications and outreach efforts. Bloom Works is a woman-owned digital services, communication, and consulting company. We help governments meet the changing needs of those they serve.

After establishing a digital service team for the City of Boston (and leading all web and social media communications during the blizzards of 2015), I started Bloom in 2018 with one mission: to help government agencies deliver sustainable, people-centered, and data-driven services to those who need it the most. That's why your call for non-traditional, community-powered communication attracted our attention.

I joined up with other digital leaders who've led complex communication and outreach efforts in the public sector, including recent efforts to communicate key information to those directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through our experience, we've seen how transformative -- and often underused -- a strong communication strategy can be. That's why we've recruited the best researchers, communicators, and strategists from both the public and private sectors.

We've spent the last year in partnership with organizations that are committed to supporting vulnerable and underserved communities and populations:

- In New Jersey, we redesigned the Career Network's content strategy to help people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to get back in the job force and start earning money again.
- We worked with the State of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood to help them better recognize and advocate for the unique needs of families experiencing homelessness.
- We partnered with the nonprofit Raheem -- an independent service for reporting police conduct in the U.S. -- and provided them with strategic communication recommendations to better support people impacted by police violence.
- We're working with another nonprofit, Think of Us, to share the research and findings we also helped gather to address the critical needs of youth aging out of the foster care system.

We'd welcome the opportunity to partner with you for a number of reasons:

- **The opportunity for impact is huge.** We know that without a solid communication and outreach strategy, even the best set-up organizations can fail to connect with those who need services the most. We also understand that the time to establish these crucial communication channels and build trust with your constituents is well in advance of — rather than during — a crisis.
- **We're experts in human-centered research.** Empathy is at the core of our DNA. We specialize in using human-centered research to power our designs and communication strategies. We're prepared to work with you, and the people of Springfield, to ensure that you're set up for success to reach all the constituents you serve.
- **We're a good fit.** Every day, we work with organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors to deliver actionable plans and accessible, human-centered content. We come with deep experience in strategic research, plain language communication, and branding to help our partners engage their staff and those in their community.

Out of respect for your time, we've kept our response succinct. Of course, if there's more detail that would be helpful, we're happy to provide that. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Lockwood
Founder and Principal

Proposed Approach

Our approach

With empathy as our foundation, Bloom strives to understand our clients' goals and audiences. These insights power each of our recommendations and action plans.

We understand that the challenges facing the City of Springfield, while similar to those of other communities, are nuanced and subject to a variety of local factors. We plan to explore these factors -- like which channels various populations rely on for information, how key information flows within and across departments, and how information is shared with the residents of Springfield. We plan to customize our project to ensure we address the right goals and pain points.

As practical idealists, we bring high expectations to each project. But we are also cognizant of and experienced at working within constraints. Our approach to this work -- and its ultimate success -- will depend on our access to environmental justice populations, so we can fully understand their needs. We expect the city to assist in connecting us with specific groups, individuals, and populations whose perspectives we want to understand as part of this work.

Phase 0: Kickoff (Week 1)

During kickoff, Bloom will meet with Springfield's core team to clarify objectives and establish a shared set of guiding goals for the work. We'll discuss in detail the various audiences we should have in mind and solicit input from during the course of the project.

Activities

- Project kickoff
- Project planning

Deliverables

- Kickoff agenda and activities
- Kickoff summary
- Project plan and timeline

Phase 1: Discovery (Weeks 2-5)

During the discovery phase, we'll conduct research with key audiences, including the environmental justice populations outlined in Attachment A of the RFP. We'll look outward to examine how issues are perceived by residents and the ways they currently obtain information related to emergencies and city resources. And we'll look inward to understand how information is organized and disseminated by key staff and internal stakeholders, particularly during crises. We'll also incorporate insights and lessons learned from our work with other government agencies to apply best practices from similar contexts.

Activities

- Develop research plan
- Review any existing research
- Conduct an environmental scan
- Conduct a communications audit of existing tools, communication patterns, and media coverage for the City of Springfield
- Conduct user research, such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys with key audiences
- At the end of each week, conduct a mini-synthesis to distill insights from research
- Share interim findings with core Springfield team to expand and/or redirect research focus as needed

Deliverables

- Summarized findings from research and environmental scan
- Summarized findings from communications audit

Phase 2: Synthesis & Recommendations (Weeks 6-8)

In our synthesis phase, we'll examine the full body of findings from discovery and distill overarching insights. We'll share these findings with you to gather any additional feedback from the Springfield team before translating them into strategic recommendations.

Throughout the project, we'll evaluate your needs for long-term outreach and communication success. We expect to include training sessions, style guides, and other support as needed.

Activities

- Iterate on findings and identify whether more research is necessary
- Identify horizon-scanning observations and opportunities for impact
- Present findings and recommendations to key stakeholders

Deliverables

- Summarized findings from user research
- Strategic communication and media outreach recommendations to help the city improve its messaging and communication with residents, especially in environmental justice communities

We believe collaboration with Springfield's core team is critical for our success. We encourage staff to embed with our team as we conduct our research, distill lessons from what we learn, and develop strategic recommendations. We recommend regular check-ins with an internal project lead to help us iterate in real-time and increase our team's effectiveness.

As efficient researchers, strategists, and writers, we are confident we can accomplish the approach outlined above and build quality deliverables within the budget outlined in the RFP.

Team

For this project, we expect our team to include a lead communication strategist with support from a content specialist. We'll also be able to pull in additional experts as needed throughout the course of the project, such as user researchers and creative designers.

Our team's experience makes us particularly well suited for this project. Collectively, we have extensive experience developing state and federal communication strategies for emergencies as well as a long history of working with agencies in Massachusetts. We've included some examples below.

As a distributed team, we're experienced in remote collaboration, as well as in conducting virtual interviews and research sessions. While it's perhaps less meaningful during COVID-19, 2 of our staff members also live in nearby Northampton. They're quite familiar with western Massachusetts and – once the pandemic ends – could easily meet with your team and Springfield residents in person.

Emergency Communication

One team member worked for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) as a Health Educator responsible for the statewide Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Helpline. Members of our team have also worked as contractors for MDPH, lending their plain language expertise to many projects. Perhaps most notably, we collaborated with the Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management on an app (Android and iOS) to help people with communication challenges and emergency workers communicate during crises.

On a federal level, members of our team have led content strategy for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Natural Disasters and Severe Weather pages, which include essential guidance for the public about how to stay safe during emergencies. Bloom staff has also led content strategy on many projects for the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which focuses on helping the public protect themselves from environmental exposure to hazardous substances.

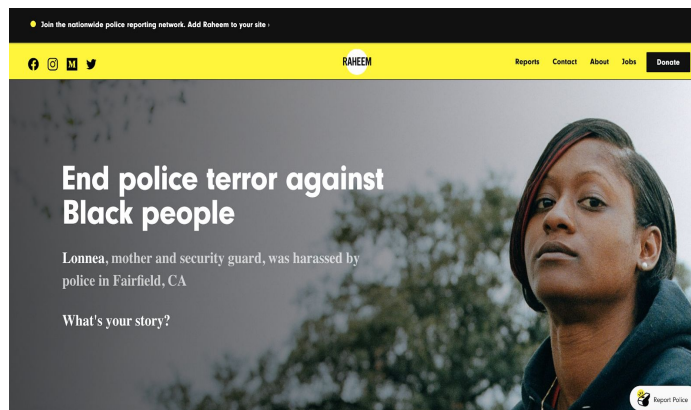
Supporting Marginalized Populations

Our team members also have extensive experience working with and supporting marginalized populations. While directing communication and outreach efforts for an innovation hub in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one of our team members helped kick-start an effort to bring government attention, dialogue, and support to the Maker Movement in health. Our charge was to empower patients and their families to source better, low-cost solutions for their health and health care challenges.

We've also worked with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, which supports communities in accessing safe water and wastewater. Our discovery research involved gaining a deep understanding for the needs of small and diverse rural communities across the country ranging from migrant laborers in California to rural towns like Maryville, Missouri.

Relevant Work Samples

We have deep experience in both research and strategic communication. Below are a few relevant samples from our portfolio. Two are full case studies, and then we've included 4 shorter project snapshots with links to our website for more details.



Case Study: Using Strategic Communication to End Police Violence Against Black People

Bloom partnered with Raheem to develop an actionable communication strategy to spur greater engagement to end police violence.

The Challenge

Raheem is an independent service for reporting police conduct in the U.S. It was founded in response to a lack of reporting, accountability, and oversight in policing in America, where getting killed by the police is a [leading cause of death among young black men](#). Given that 95% of people who experience police violence don't report it, Raheem is working to change that. They're engaging with communities, using information and data to help people seek justice and advance policies to end police violence against Black people.

Raheem is a lean but mighty team with a clear vision and objectives, and they were looking for guidance on their storytelling and communication efforts. They also wanted to create new content that could help people visualize a world where police aren't needed.

The Project

The Raheem team asked Bloom to look at how they could leverage communication to advance their objectives, which include:

- Building a robust database of police conduct
- Supporting individuals and communities who report police in seeking justice
- Promoting policy change
- Furthering a collective vision of a world without police

The Bloom team conducted a communications audit around Raheem's current storytelling efforts. This involved analyzing their existing digital communication channels in terms of messaging consistency, effectiveness, weaknesses and opportunities. We conducted interviews with the Raheem team and did landscape research around [current abolitionist thinking and approaches](#) as it connects to the [defund the police movement](#). We then used our research and interviews to map out strategies to increase engagement and further their goals.

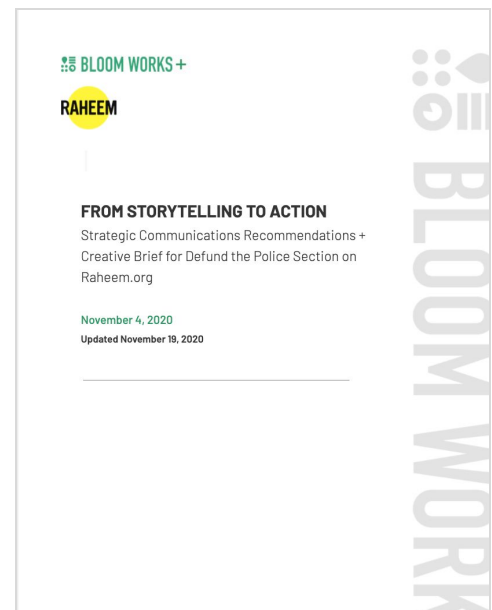
The Result

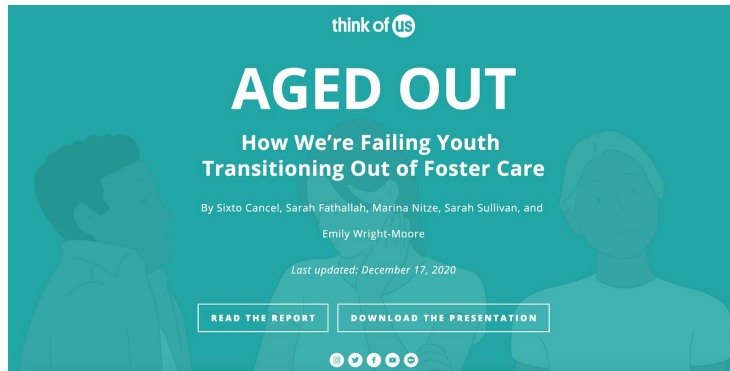
The Raheem team wants their work to support and empower those who report incidents of police violence to their database, "moving them from being a victim of police violence to being an advocate for abolition."

Based on the communication audit, staff interviews, and additional research, Bloom delivered:

1. Robust strategic communication recommendations to spur greater engagement and action that included short- and long-term approaches to actualizing its objectives
2. A creative brief outlining compelling ways to help users visualize a world without police

The Raheem team plans to use the recommendations to help further prioritize their communication strategy and take steps towards securing resources to build out the new digital content and develop animations.





Case Study: Identifying Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

The Challenge

Across the country, outcomes for young people who've been in the foster care system and aged out are universally poor. Compared to the general population, they're [more likely](#) to face homelessness, lower educational attainment, health consequences of trauma, substance abuse, early death, and prison. While the problems within the system are well known, efforts to solve them have been unsuccessful.

To make matters worse, foster care services often end abruptly for teens and young adults. These vulnerable young people – many of whom have been put on medications for anxiety, anger, or depression – find themselves without a support network or access to resources like health care.

[Think of Us](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to leveraging the power of personal experience, technology, and design to improve the lives of youth in foster care. Their team was looking to better understand the transition experience for youth aging out of foster care.

The Project

The Think of Us team engaged Bloom Works (Bloom) to talk with youth and staff in 5 partner sites to identify technology interventions that could prepare young people more effectively as they age out of foster care. Our researchers worked closely with the Think of Us team throughout the duration of the project (about 12 weeks in total). We conducted 2 days of interviews with staff and teens at each of the 5 partner sites.

Our research focused on:

- How the foster care system looks to teens and on-the-ground staff
- Where the system is doing well and where it's falling short
- Specific interventions that could improve the lives of people in foster care, particularly of youth aging out of care

Our analysis of the qualitative data identified 3 opportunity areas for impactful interventions.

Healing and dealing with trauma

All youth in foster care have experienced trauma, since removal from the home — for whatever reason — is traumatic. Young people need a caring, stable, and nurturing environment to recover, but the foster care system often fails to provide that.

Preparing youth for their aging out transition

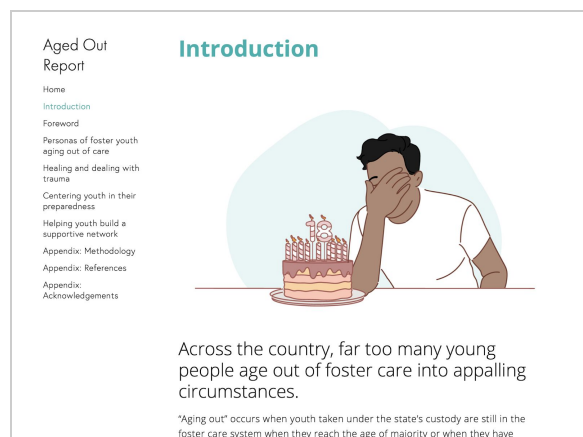
The current methods for preparing young people to transition from foster care to being independent young adults aren't working. Teens and staff all spoke of the need for building life skills, like planning for the future and managing money. Even though the system spends a lot of energy on "preparedness," these efforts are often lost in translation to youth. Preparedness needs to be defined and understood by young people themselves. They also called for preparing young people with strong coping skills before they leave the structured foster care system.

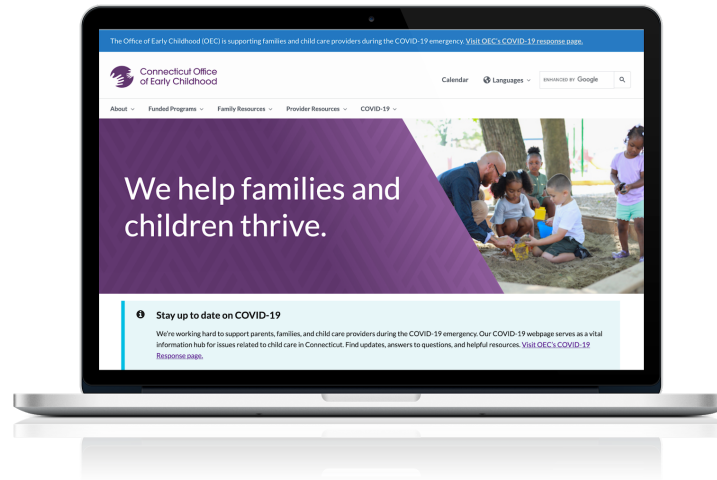
Helping youth build a supportive network

The youth we spoke to talked about a dichotomy of relationships with supportive adults — paid adults within the system and other adults outside of the system they keep deliberately isolated in an effort to maintain these relationships. This dichotomy leaves young people without a clear system of support once they exit foster care. They lose access to paid staff, and they're reluctant to ask for help from others.

The Result

The team [published a report](#) that represents a key step forward in creating positive change for youth in foster care in the U.S. Through our partnership with youth, staff, and Think of Us, we've gained a deeper understanding of what's happening for youth in the foster care system. And just as importantly, we've documented some specific opportunities for meaningful interventions.





Snapshot: [State of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood \(OEC\)](#)

Timeline: November 2018 - ongoing

- [Transformed web presence and content strategy](#), creating an easy-to-use site with accessible and mobile-friendly design
- Worked with OEC and their wide range of stakeholders to ensure site design and communication strategy achieved primary goals
- Worked iteratively and tested each section with potential users, focusing on UX, plain language, and accessibility features
- Developed internal communication guidelines, which helped OEC adopt consistent messaging across various materials
- Helped the agency [streamline digital communication during COVID-19](#), leading to a nearly 500% jump in page views
- Out of 3,000 users surveyed, 84% said they relied on the new site for COVID-19 information
- **Bloom role: UX research, UX design, content strategy, plain language writing, software development**

Links

- [OEC's New Website](#)
- [Staff Website Support for COVID-19 Content](#)



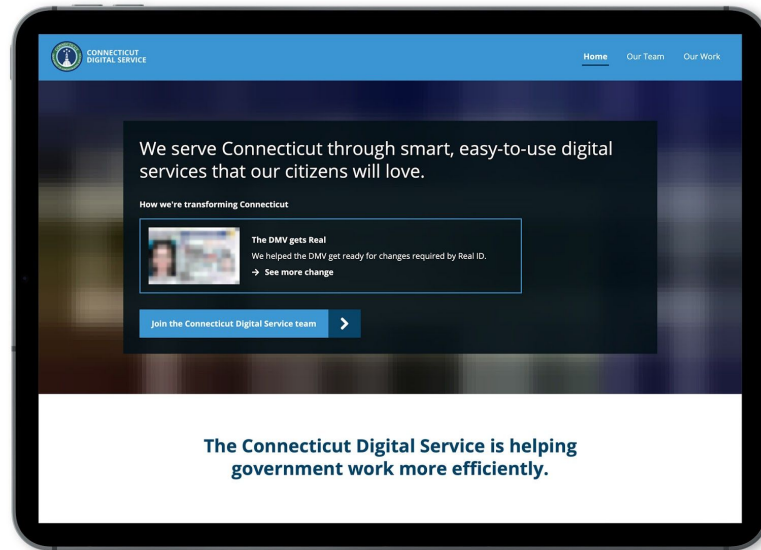
Snapshot: [Organize: Organ Donation Reform](#)

Timeline: July - October, 2020

- Interviewed more than 30 people within the organ donation space to identify challenges and opportunities for reforming organ donation in the U.S.
- Documented our findings and recommendations in a series of reports and visualizations that were endorsed by 5 former CTOs of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Project was reported on by [Bloomberg](#) and cited in bipartisan oversight from the [Senate Finance Committee](#)
- **Bloom role: design research, content analysis, content strategy, and creative**

Links

- [Summary of Findings PDF](#)
- [Reports on Github](#)
- [Bloomberg Report](#)



Snapshot: Strategic Communication for the State of Connecticut

Timeline: October 2019 to August 2020

- Collaborated with the State of Connecticut’s digital service team to develop a strategic communication plan. This work involved:
 - an audit of the team’s existing communications channels
 - an understanding of the state’s current communications assets and resources
 - workshop to describe the various audiences, their needs, and expectations
- Amplified the work by generating case studies, sharing and disseminating insights from projects with the CT’s Office of Early Childhood on Medium, and facilitating connections with strategic partners, like New America and StateScoop
- Offered strategic advisory support and developed internal communications materials to build greater awareness and buy-in for digital transformation efforts
- **Bloom role: strategic communication, content strategy, design, implementation, and advisory support**

Link

- [Connecticut Digital Services](#)