



Addendum No. 2
to
Brand Renewal and Influence Campaign - Request for Proposals

RFP 2026-BRNDRN

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA)
North Adams, MA

4/9/2026

This Addendum forms a part of RFP 2026-BRNDRN documents and modifies the original dated March 23, 2026, as noted below. Bidders must acknowledge receipt of this Addendum within their sealed proposal. Failure to do so may result in disqualification.

This Addendum is comprised of pages 1 through 17.

Responses to Questions

1. We are interested in preparing a proposal for the first four categories: Brand Research and Discovery, Brand Strategy Development, Institutional Narrative and Differentiation, Visual Identity and Brand Architecture. Is it acceptable to submit a proposal for these categories, specifically?

Yes, we welcome partial submissions from agencies around certain areas of expertise. We look forward to reviewing your submission.

2. How should the selected firm collaborate with the existing market research partner, and what specific deliverables will be provided to inform this work?

All data from the market research engagement will be available to the firm hired. We have a positive working relationship with our market research partner and feel they would be available to speak with the hired firm, if needed.

3. To what extent is new primary research expected vs. synthesis and validation of existing research findings?

This is more validation and utilizes market research to drive brand discovery and direction.

4. Can you clarify expectations for the “three brand positioning platforms”— how fully developed should creative expression be for each?

While it is not necessary, the CMO is accustomed to this approach from prior experience partnering with firms that developed a handful of brand options to test. This does not mean this is the direction the hired firm needs to adopt. This is based on past experiences the CMO has had with rebranding projects at other institutions.

5. For recruitment materials (e.g., 5,500 viewbooks, DGCE materials), should vendors include full design, production, and print management —or strategy and templates only?

Yes— full design, production, and print management.

6. For DGCE materials (“~50 pieces per program”), how many programs should vendors assume for scoping purposes?

Currently, DGCE offers an MBA, M.Ed., and a Leadership Academy certificate. These are the three DGCE programs you should assume for scoping purposes.

7. What level of execution is expected for the “multi-year influence campaign”— strategic roadmap only, or campaign development and launch support?

Strategic roadmap and some, if not all, campaign development. For example, key overarching messages in the roadmap should be developed, but secondary messages can be managed in-house if it is more advantageous to do so.

8. For digital recommendations (website, AI search, UX), are vendors expected to provide strategy only or also wireframes/prototypes for envisioned recommendations?

Our website is in great shape thanks to an updated, enhanced site launched in late 2025. We will not need support there other than new brand elements for us to incorporate into the CMS. Digital recommendations should be viewed as digital advertisements and awareness strategies, not implementation. (i.e., Where should we be digitally, what digital modes should be used, digital campaign duration, and overall digital display.)

9. Is there an anticipated budget range for this engagement (strategy + creative + materials), or should vendors propose based on full scope as outlined? Ranges may vary considerably depending on a host of scope details that are not yet clear, so any

guidance on the sort of budget framework you have to work within or guidance on how we should treat budget recommendations would be helpful.

No budget has been set.

10. Should vendors include detailed cost estimates for full 24–36 month implementation, or just high-level ranges?

Detailed cost estimates would be extremely helpful for clearly outlining each area and moving forward effectively.

11. Who are the primary decision-makers and approval authorities for brand platform selection?

The Chief Marketing Officer will review all submissions and present options to the identified leadership members, the enrollment committee, and President Birge. The incoming president, once named, will also be included and will ultimately determine the direction MCLA takes with this project.

12. How many stakeholder interviews or engagement sessions should vendors anticipate during discovery?

Typically, stakeholder interviews/sessions would be 1-3 total, with the groups outlined.

13. Are there defined baseline metrics (enrollment, awareness, perception) that will be used to measure success post-launch?

Enrollment growth and market awareness penetration will be determining factors in brand success.

14. MCLA notes the possibility of awarding to multiple firms—can you clarify which components (e.g., strategy vs. execution) may be split?

Creative may be broken out and awarded to one firm, while strategy and execution may go to another.

15. Given the aggressive timeline (July–December for brand development and launch), are there priority deliverables that should be phased for initial launch vs. post-launch?

We are flexible with the rollout but would like to have key enrollment messages (core content narratives in the CRM) and, ideally, a viewbook ready soon after launch to support yielding the incoming class.

16. How does MCLA define “influence campaign” in this context (brand awareness, enrollment marketing, reputation, or all of the above)?

Both areas.

17. Are there existing brand constraints that must be retained?

This has not been discussed, but there may not be an appetite to adapt the logo or seal.

18. The RFP references “sealed” technical and price proposals. Should submissions be interpreted as physical sealed documents, or will digital submissions suffice if clearly separated?

Digitally sealed documents are sufficient.

19. Are vendors permitted to include recommended additional scope elements beyond those listed, if they believe these would strengthen the overall outcome?

Yes, and we would welcome them.

20. Will MCLA share findings from the recently completed market research (e.g., audience perceptions, competitive positioning, institutional strengths) with the selected partner?

All data from the market research engagement will be available to the firm hired. We have a positive working relationship with our market research partner and feel they would be available to connect with the hired firm, if needed.

21. Based on the Addendum stating “no additional market research is required at this time,” should vendors assume this project is strictly a strategic interpretation of existing findings? In areas where additional validation or insight may be beneficial or necessary, should vendors assume responsibility for conducting incremental research?

Yes, strategic. This is further validation of the market research data and its use to drive brand discovery and direction.

22. Will MCLA provide access to audiences (e.g., prospective students, families, alumni, counselors) for research and testing, or should vendors plan to source and fund independent panels?

Yes.

23. For the longitudinal comparison, should the analysis incorporate both 2019 and 2026 research, or focus strictly on comparison to 2019 benchmarks?

Both 2019 and 2026.

24. The RFP requests development of three distinct brand positioning platforms. Should these be interpreted as three alternative brand territories (with differentiated promises and narratives), or as variations of a single core positioning uncovered by the recent research?

While not necessary, the CMO is accustomed to this from experience partnering with firms that developed a handful of brand options to test. This does not mean this is the direction the hired firm needs to adopt. This is based on past experiences the CMO has had with rebranding projects at other institutions. Single, core positioning option variations are how this should be interpreted.

25. When testing brand platforms, what primary success metrics are most important (e.g., awareness, recall, affinity, preference, differentiation)?

Awareness is our focus. We also need to clearly demonstrate our unique value as a public liberal arts school that is smaller and more residential than other public options in the state. We overlap with both public and private institutions, and defining our niche is an area we need to develop and clarify.

26. For the “Institutional Narrative & Differentiation” deliverable, should this be a standalone output, or is it expected to be embedded within the selected brand platform?

Within the selected brand platform.

27. Are the differentiation points outlined in the RFP expected to be validated through research, or should they be treated as directional inputs?

Directional inputs.

28. Regarding “updates to logo usage and hierarchy,” can you confirm whether this refers to usage guidelines only, or if modifications to core marks/logos are within scope?

Usage guidelines. I am unsure of the appetite to change the logos at this point. MCLA has had the same logo and seal since 1997. A compelling case can be made to move away from the established logo, and we would consider it, but not necessarily act on it.

29. For athletics brand alignment, should this effort focus on strategic alignment with the institutional brand, or extend into executional elements such as uniforms and visual systems?

Athletics has a strong brand recognition; no execution of their branding is expected. We must ensure the updated brand launch aligns with the existing athletic brand. No visual or uniform adaptations are expected from this engagement.

30. Should the RFP response include detailed production costs (e.g., printing, delivery) for recruitment materials, or is that intended for later phases of the engagement?

Yes. This is a new strategic area for MCLA. The anticipated annual investment in marketing to attract and retain growth in all areas must be clearly outlined and presented.

31. For email templates and digital assets, what CRM/email platform is currently in use, and should vendors plan to deliver design files only or build directly within your system?

We are a Slate school. Design file delivery is expected. If you can build custom journey infrastructure in Slate, please include that cost as a separate line item.

32. Can you clarify the distinction between DGCE/graduate recruitment materials and DGCE program materials/templates?

DGCE graduate recruitment materials focus on the three programs it recruits for: MBA, M.Ed., and the Leadership Academy. The program materials relate to things like program one-sheets, postcards, and email templates.

33. For “AI-powered search and digital user experience,” are you seeking technical recommendations (e.g., tools/platforms), or strategic guidance on how the brand integrates into existing systems?

We have an excellent group of vendors and are seeing success with them. We plan to retain current vendor partnerships in this area. Additional tool recommendations are always welcome. We are seeking strategic guidance on integrating the new brand across established partnerships and platforms.

34. Can you share MCLA’s enrollment and growth targets by year to inform the implementation roadmap and budget modeling?

Yes. Please review our enrollment goals outlined in our Strategic Plan. The institutional data, including enrollment data, is also included for your review:
[2024-2025MCLA-Factbook.pdf](#)
[Strategic Plan 2025-30](#)

35. When referencing “photography and video outlines and direction,” should vendors assume that original production is out of scope for this phase, or is new production expected?

We have built our photography and video library over the past year, since it was outdated. We will need new production in the photography space. We do have a talented photographer in the region, Tricia McCormack, who does two large shoots on campus each year. We also have a contracted photographer on staff for smaller needs throughout the year. We can utilize your photographer, but we would expect our photographers to be educated in stylistic direction and execution so the same look and feel can be carried forward. If preferred, we can utilize our photographers and have you train them at the onset. Videography needs are limited, and not a critical need.

36. Should vendors assume that the initial brand launch will rely on existing visual assets, or is there openness to new asset development (aka an incremental photo/video production)?

Both. As stated directly above, we have strong assets, especially in the video space, but we need more in the photo images.

37. Can you provide historical advertising spend and any anticipated changes in future investment levels?

We have not had a true ad cadence in recent years. This is why outlining a realistic cost is so important. I can share that, prior to May 2025, the advertising spend was around \$80,000. This fiscal year, we have doubled that figure. Most of our state university sister campuses have significantly larger marketing budgets. The need to demonstrate level-setting budgets to build and retain growth is critical.

38. For environmental branding (e.g., signage, campus elements), should cost estimates be included in the RFP response, or developed during the engagement?

Please include upfront in the RFP.

39. More broadly, should the RFP response include full financial modeling for brand activation, or is that expected as a project deliverable post-award?

Yes, it is valuable to have a full financial model for brand activation.

40. The RFP references identifying geographic growth opportunities and promotion strategies. Should this be interpreted as development of a multi-year enrollment marketing plan?

Yes. Our market research will have outlined growth regions for us, and a multi-year brand rollout strategy for new markets is expected.

41. Will MCLA share its current strategic plan to inform alignment with institutional priorities?

Yes. it is captured above, but here it is again: [Strategic Plan 2025-30](#)

42. For ongoing measurement and KPIs, are you seeking a recommended framework, or executional support in tracking and reporting performance?

We can track executional support. Framework is expected.

43. When establishing metrics for brand lift and performance, should vendors define the metrics only, or also establish baseline benchmarks (which may require additional research)?

Metrics and comparison against industry averages are expected.

44. The RFP references building upon the 2019 brand. Can you provide materials or context outlining the evolution of the brand during that period?

Yes, we will provide those once a firm has been hired.

45. The RFP asks whether MCLA has the internal resources to support the brand. Should vendors include a formal organizational assessment and recommendations, or address this more informally within strategic guidance?

Strategic guidance is a great place to start. If needed, an addendum can be made later to include a formal organizational assessment.

46. Is there flexibility within individual phases of the timeline if the overall completion date is maintained?

Yes.

47. For Phase 3 testing, are there specific expectations for quantitative methodologies, or should vendors propose their recommended approach?

The vendor is encouraged to propose the approach.

48. The timeline does not appear to account for new photo/video production. Should vendors assume this is intentionally excluded?

Video is excluded. We could adapt the photography timeline if deemed necessary at the onset of creative development.

49. The RFP references both email submission and sealed proposals. Can you please clarify whether submissions are to be made electronically only, and how the “sealed” requirement should be interpreted?

Both can be made electronically. Please redact or omit prices and pricing/payment information and sections from the unsealed version.

50. Can you confirm that the completed proposal should include two separate submissions—a Technical (Non-Price) Proposal and a Price Proposal?

Yes. Confirmed.

51. What existing quantitative and qualitative research will be made available to the selected team for use in this engagement?

All market research data will be provided to the hired agency from our partnership with ADV market research (2026 engagement), and any market research data we have from Simpson Scarborough (2019 engagement).

52. Does MCLA expect primary quantitative research (e.g., statistically valid surveys) to be conducted as part of this engagement, or would a qualitative-led approach supported by existing institutional research and benchmarking be considered acceptable?

Testing brand options through quantitative surveys is preferred.

53. Is MCLA open to proposals that include specialized partner firms or subconsultants to support specific components of the work, or is there a preference for a fully in-house delivery model?

Yes, we are open to that.

54. Could you clarify the anticipated number and level of stakeholder engagements (e.g., interviews, workshops, focus groups) across key audiences?

Typically, stakeholder interviews/sessions would be 1-3 total, with the groups outlined.

55. Can you clarify the preferred format for presenting relevant experience (e.g., case studies, team CVs, or a combination of both), and whether there is a preferred number of project examples to include based on the evaluation criteria referencing 3–5+ similar projects?

We are open to all relevant experience formats. Please feel empowered to showcase your strongest examples in whichever format you have.

56. Could MCLA provide a target budget range or anticipated investment level for this engagement to help proposers tailor scope and approach effectively?

We do not have an established budget, though the CMO has an idea of what this may run based on past experience at other institutions.

57. Is there a budget allocated for the first five phases of work? We're looking to understand the scale of the project and determine if our agency is a good fit for this work.

An endeavor of this size has not been conducted at MCLA. We do not have an established budget, though the CMO has an idea of what this may run based on past experience at other institutions.

58. What are the top three outcomes this work must achieve, such as enrollment growth, stronger reputation, increased awareness, higher donations, or an improved employer brand?

Enrollment growth and market awareness penetration will be determining factors in brand success. We must also strengthen the brand, which has undergone a name and mascot change over the past few decades, causing fragmentation among our alumni.

59. What outcomes or results would make leadership feel this investment was truly worthwhile?

Enrollment growth and overall brand recognition through conversations. Attracting students and donors from currently silent markets we historically pulled from.

60. Is there anything currently confusing or inconsistent about the brand, or anything that may be hurting your success?

MCLA is a square peg in a round hole. We're public, affordable. We are also the state's liberal arts college, intentionally smaller, more residential. We pull more

students from outside Massachusetts than any other public university except UMass Amherst. While we compete with many of the regional publics, we also compete with local private liberal arts and small institutions, some of which are quite prestigious. The name and mascot change have fragmented our brand recognition. We also added several non-liberal arts majors, such as Rad Tech and Nursing, which are growing, but not traditional liberal arts programs. Our student body shifted as we became MCLA (formerly North Adams State College), and the student culture has changed. (Example: Greek Life is no longer a student activity.) We are in a bit of an identity crisis and need to feel secure that the brand we adopt clearly states who we are, who we once were, and what our differentiating value to the world is.

61. How different do you want the visual identity to be from what currently exists? Are you looking for a refined evolution that stays close to the current brand, or a more significant transformation?

We have some strong visual identities, and moving completely away isn't necessary. We should find a way to unify and incorporate things we know are working. For example, our newly launched enhanced website has successfully demonstrated our value through student voices and first-person narratives.

62. Do you want the athletics logo and brand to be part of the rebrand, or should the sports identity remain as is, with the "Trailblazers" name and mountain lion mascot? If yes, how much can the athletics brand change?

Athletics has strong brand recognition; no execution of their branding is expected. We must ensure the updated brand launch aligns with the existing athletic brand. No visual or uniform adaptations are expected from this engagement.

63. As part of the first five phases of work, are you looking for a full website redesign, including UX and UI, an update that retains the current structure while aligning the look and feel with the new visual identity, or would you prefer to address the website at a later date?

Our website is in great shape thanks to an updated, enhanced site launched in late 2025. We will not need support there. Digital recommendations should be viewed as digital advertisements and awareness strategies, not

implementation. (i.e. Where should we be digitally, what digital modes should be used, digital campaign duration, and overall digital display.)

64. What is your current website CMS? Do you have an internal digital team that will handle back-end development, or should development be included in our scope?

We use Modern Campus and have one dedicated FT web communications manager.

65. We want to confirm that, within the first five phases of work, you are looking for our agency to develop key print materials, such as a viewbook or travel pieces, that reflect the new brand.

Yes. Confirmed.

66. Are you currently looking for a budget that covers only the first five phases of work, such as stakeholder interviews, audit, brand strategy, messaging, testing, visual identity development, brand guidelines, and the brand launch plan, with implementation efforts like website, print collateral, campaigns, video, digital content, signage, and templates to be scoped and budgeted in later phases after reviewing the launch plan and associated timing and costs?

We would want the total pricing for both phases.

67. What research has been completed or is currently underway, and what final deliverables or outputs will be available for us to review?

We are happy to share all market research data with the hired firm.

68. Some of the language and questions in the RFP, such as understanding whether MCLA's brand is improving, stagnant, or declining, seem like they would be addressed through the primary research currently underway and scheduled to wrap in Spring 2026. The addendum notes that no additional market research is required, so we want to confirm that comprehensive research outputs will be available to inform the rebrand, including insights on the brand's strengths and weaknesses, audience perceptions, competitive positioning, points of differentiation, key decision drivers, barriers to enrollment, geographic opportunities, and other critical findings.

Yes, this is confirmed, and we will share all information with the hired firm.

69. Can you share, at a high level, what the research revealed about the brand's messaging, positioning, visual identity, and overall perception?

Overall, we need to build awareness. We need to strengthen our messaging around outcomes. We are affordable, but we need to define value to avoid appearing cheap. We need to press offerings, and the students interested in those will come verses focusing on one student type.

70. What internal resources exist within your communications or marketing department? This will help us understand your team structure and capacity when making recommendations for brand implementation and the campaign.

Marketing is a new team reporting to the provost, with three members: the CMO, who works 4 days/30 hours; a web communications manager; and a marketing manager who handles social media and some junior graphic design needs. There is a director of communications, who reports directly to the president and sits at the cabinet level. While these groups collaborate, they fall under different reporting lines and structures.

71. What is the realistic annual budget for the brand launch and implementation? We are trying to understand the pace of rollout across touchpoints and the overall scale of the campaign.

The hope is between \$100-200,000. Though there is understanding that this may be a low figure.

72. What is your current annual budget for paid media? Would there be a separate budget allocated for the brand launch campaign?

\$130,000. Yes, the brand launch would be separate from our paid media campaign.

73. Who needs to be part of the approval process? This will help us understand the number of stakeholders involved, as well as the expected rounds of revisions and presentations.

The CMO will manage the process and present the options. In the past, we have included members of the enrollment committee and select cabinet members, including the Chief of Staff, Provost, and President. With a new president coming in, this approval process could change.

74. Could you provide PDFs of your current recruitment and lifecycle materials to help us understand approximate page counts? Alternatively, would you be able to share estimated page counts for the materials you'd like included in the RFP response?

We have rolled back print materials entirely in recent years. Since establishing a new marketing team, the charge is to bring some print pieces back. MCLA is small, and a viewbook shouldn't exceed 16-22 pages. The recruitment pieces should be smaller; 4-6 panels should suffice. This is an estimate, not a direction. We can adapt if needed.

75. Can you share more context behind the proposed timeline? Is there flexibility within that timeframe based on scope or approach?

Yes, there is flexibility. We are trying to align the launch with enrollment cycles, but we can adapt if needed.

76. Who is currently leading or supporting your market research efforts? Is the agency that performed the research also bidding for this work?

ADV Market Research. They are not bidding but have recommended their partner agencies to bid on this project.

77. Could you share an overview of the market research conducted to date so we can better understand the insights and inputs that will inform this work? Can you confirm that external market perception has been established and a competitive analysis has been conducted?

Yes. The RFP can be found here under the awarded bids section: [Procurement](#)

78. Does the project have flexibility through our strategic advising if additional work is recommended?

Absolutely.

79. Would you be open to an approach that aligns leadership around a unified, defined brand strategy (including brand promise, messaging pillars, and supporting proof points) and then tests creative campaign concepts against that foundation?

Yes.

80. Do you have an established budget range for this initiative that you're able to share?

We do not.

81. Can you share how this work will be overseen on your end, including the primary stakeholders or decision-making structure (e.g., committee, leadership team, or designated lead)?

The CMO will be the primary contact, and there may be key times throughout the engagement when the firm will be expected to demonstrate areas of work to select members of leadership across campus, though interactions like this will be limited.

82. Who are your current agency partners?

ADV (market research), ERI (web design, video), Manaferra (SEO/AEO) RW Jones (social media strategy), and Viv Higher Ed (digital ad/paid media).

83. What is the budget allocated for this initiative?

We do not have an established budget. This will be funded by strategic plan funds and will require board approval.

84. Does the price proposal need to include an estimated range for production costs of the items listed in Section 5 "Recruitment & Lifecycle Materials" based on the quantities provided?

- a. If yes, can you provide page counts and specifications for past versions as a baseline?

Yes. We have rolled back print materials entirely in recent years. Since establishing a new marketing team, the charge is to bring back some print pieces. MCLA is small, and a viewbook shouldn't exceed 16-22 pages. The recruitment pieces should be smaller; 4-6 panels should suffice. This is an estimate, not a direction. We can adapt if needed.

85. Can you share exactly what research was recently completed? We anticipate that you will share results with the awarded agency, but we're interested in knowing what studies were completed and which populations they address.

Yes. The RFP can be found here, under the [Procurement](#) Awarded Bids section. We are willing to share more details once the project has been awarded to a firm. Prospective graduate and graduate students, school counselors, alumni, employers, and current faculty/staff/students were included in the research.

86. Are there key interim deadlines, or other interim or internal reporting requirements?

No.

87. Does MCLA have a preferred format for the final deliverable(s)?

No.

88. What is the anticipated start date, and how flexible is your timeline?

The goal is shortly after the start of the fiscal year in July, though we can be flexible if need be.