

**Strengthening Trust and Resilience (STAR)**  
**Nontraditional Communications Scope of Work**

**Application Deadline: Friday, March 6, 5:00pm Eastern**  
Please send proposals to: [starproposals@cartercenter.org](mailto:starproposals@cartercenter.org)

**Background:** Since 2020, The Carter Center has pursued an integrated slate of activities designed to strengthen elections, build trust in democracy, and reduce political and identity-based violence via the STAR program. Starting in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, the Center built cross-partisan networks by bringing together civic leaders, influencers, and citizens to serve as community advocates for peaceful political engagement. As of December 2025, we expanded into Michigan and Wisconsin, with over 4,500 members in six established Democracy Resilience Networks (DRNs). Working with members of each network, The Center developed community conflict response plans for use around the 2022 and 2024 elections and trained network members in conflict-sensitive communication. The response plans were designed to constructively counter electoral mis- and disinformation and to organize messaging for violence mitigation.

Additionally, prior to the elections, the Center organized public events to proactively share information about the electoral processes. Media coverage of Carter Center initiatives surrounding the midterm elections and beyond reached millions of Americans with pro-democracy and anti-violence messaging.

**Project next steps:** Building on lessons learned around the 2022 and 2024 elections, the STAR program will: (1) continue to work with individual and community partners to contribute to reinforcing democratic norms in the U.S.; (2) empower communities with networks, structures, and skills designed to mitigate anti-democratic and violent behavior, and reduce political/identity-based violence, and (3) increase trust in electoral institutions, processes and results, when warranted. And, in addition to the current six target states of AZ, FL, GA, NC, MI, and WI, the Center plans to expand to two additional states in early 2026.

**What we have:** The Carter Center has hired senior, part-time consultants in all its target states to lead each state's grassroots efforts. These state leads, typically one Republican and one Democratic representative in each state, work in pairs. They are experienced, well-known public figures in their states. Many are former elected officials. They have been tasked with recruiting citizens into their respective state networks. Each has an established state network with its own name, logo, and website. In addition, the WI and NC networks have become self-sufficient and are embedded in local state institutions. All states have social media outreach capacity (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube channels, etc.) and have cultivated networks of followers, which are ripe for aggressive expansion. The hundreds of network members spread across each state represent a mix of faith leaders, party activists, and members of the business community. Most have received Carter Center trainings, equipping them to better understand why Americans are polarized, as well as skills and tactics for bridging the political divide and de-escalating tension and conflict in their communities. Finally, The Carter Center has hired a communications firm with national reach to support the STAR program's traditional comms efforts at the state level (e.g. Op-Eds, local news engagement, etc.).

**Duration and budget:** Interested firms should submit a proposal for activities from March 2026 through August 2026, with the possibility of continuing support through the 2026 elections, pending successful collaboration and funding. Proposed budgets should not exceed **\$200,000**.

**What we need:** The Carter Center is seeking a strategic communications firm that specializes in nontraditional media outreach to support the above programming in eight states (AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, WI and two TBD states). We have recruited messengers and established bipartisan community networks to promote the core values we aim to uplift – but **we need help getting the message out.** These state networks have established traditional social media networks and are limited in their ability to connect with harder-to-reach Americans: non-traditional media consumers, lower trust/lower engagement audiences, and people under fifty years of age (with an emphasis on the younger-skewing side of this group, particularly in digital spaces). At present, the DRNs lack a robust strategy and ability to test, produce, and promote messaging **beyond traditional news consumers.** As such, applicants should demonstrate in their proposals how they will identify and refine messages that resonate with non-traditional news consumers and/or low trust individuals and contribute to strategic communications outreach.

We are seeking the most effective and innovative strategy to meet these needs with the available funding. The Carter Center seeks applicants that can credibly identify the most suitable nontraditional communications channels to reach the above audience, craft and test resonant messaging, and deliver/distribute it effectively. Preferred applicants will demonstrate an ability to place broad pro-democracy/anti-violence content with the Americans in our target states who do not consume traditional news media. This may entail paying to place content as part of the contract budget; the successful firm should also demonstrate an ability to cultivate platforms and messengers who can credibly promote our content organically.

The firm should help the Carter Center and the DRNs in two broad areas:

**1. Messaging:**

- a. Develop resources, graphics, etc., for nontraditional communications dissemination.
- b. Support Carter Center in advancing the narrative proactively on issues pertaining to elections, democracy, trust in fellow Americans, and political violence, as best suited to the event and location. This is not prescriptive, but rather the communications partner should guide the Carter Center via this space based on its expertise, be it via TikTok, a specific podcast, etc. The goal is to reach the following demographic groups:
  - Center-right voters who could be inoculated against election conspiracies
  - Disaffected eligible voters; lower-trust voters
  - And voters under fifty years old (with an emphasis on men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two).

**2. Comms tools:** Provide network members with clear, accurate guidance and products that they can use to explain how elections work, elevate the work of election administrators, and reduce fear of/increase trust between politically polarized Americans. Some of these products will be produced in conjunction with The Carter Center and other organizations.

- a. Organize or create positive pro-social content (e.g. videos of Republican and Democratic politicians engaging constructively with one another, human impact stories of Americans helping each other, especially across lines of ideological difference) and prepare this material into a bank of resources for regular sharing by nontraditional platforms. This could include adapting stories of the week to talking points, taking existing Carter Center educational materials (slides, videos, etc.) and editing or repackaging them for easy reference or social media sharing, and developing other simple products, including infographics.

- b. Provide guidance on when/where it is appropriate to pay to place content to further project goals.
- c. Provide regular links to media placements.
- d. Track reach of and measure engagement with distributed content through the duration of the contract.

**Project Timeline:** The Carter Center envisions the activities outlined above as rolling out in the following phases:

1. Coordination: planning and outreach design coordinated between The Carter Center and the firm to establish outreach strategies, including landscape analysis to identify most appropriate nontraditional communications channels.
2. Preparation: once identified, focus on messenger recruitment where appropriate while beginning message and content development.
3. Ongoing Delivery: remainder of fiscal year (end of August 2026, with possibility of costed extension through the 2026 elections).

**The successful applicant will:** Demonstrate experience engaging a wide variety of Americans – urban and rural, liberal and conservative, racially and socio-economically diverse, etc. – in successful movement building and behavioral change through strategic communications via nontraditional communications means. The successful applicant will show the ability to engage the targeted groups identified above (e.g. center right voters, lower-trust voters, etc.) in nontraditional media spaces.

In addition, the successful applicant will demonstrate expertise and experience in outreach to designated target states of groups of people/influencers/nontraditional platforms.

Finally, recognizing that the goals of this project are significant, applicants should articulate how it will develop the necessary strategic communications to address the need described above (i.e., which messengers, platforms, etc.). The Carter Center will welcome creative solutions that will effectively complement our efforts. In essence, the Center seeks a partner that will suggest which approaches work, and how to effectively navigate the nontraditional communications space.