Brand Messaging Refresh
Request for Proposals

About REDF

REDF (Roberts Enterprise Development Fund) is a venture philanthropy that invests exclusively in social enterprise businesses that employ and empower people overcoming barriers to work.

Employment social enterprises (ESEs) are mission-driven, revenue-generating businesses that provide paying transitional jobs and supportive services to people with histories of incarceration, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and young people who are not in school or working. ESEs help these striving individuals stabilize their lives, develop a work history, and build skills and confidence. When employees are ready, ESEs help them find competitive employment. Because employment social enterprises reinvest their profits in their businesses so they can help more people, they require less outside funding, and are more sustainable.

REDF uses the principles of venture capital and business strategy to increase the effectiveness and impact of the sector, providing support that goes far beyond funding.

For 20+ years, REDF has partnered with the most effective and promising employment social enterprises located around the country:
- Providing capital in the forms of grants and loans, and advisory services
- Developing leaders, building community, sharing knowledge, facilitating partnerships, and championing supportive public policy
- Using data to build the evidence base and increase impact

REDF’s vision is to build a better, more inclusive society where all people have the jobs and support they need—and the pride, purpose, and path to self-sufficiency they deserve.

Background

In 2019, REDF was working to finalize our next five year strategy (2021 -2025) designed to deepen our investment in the supply of effective early-and growth-stage employment social enterprises, accelerate their impact through capital investments (grants and loans) and specialized business consulting, and catalyze demand for this cost-effective solution from the public sector and philanthropy.

When COVID19 hit, REDF marshalled our resources to provide emergency funding to the sector (see here and here for an overview). We are in the final stages of refining our strategy to address the yet to be fully realized changes to our sector and the economy that COVID has brought, and to ensure our commitment to the principles of DEI and becoming an anti-racist organization are solidly part of our
programmatic and organizational DNA. While all of our existing programs will remain in place, there will be changes to eligibility, how our partners move through programs, and some additional offerings.

REDF will be partnering with a consultant and/or firm to facilitate the DEI integration process. This work will begin in September and run through March 2021. While communications will be part of it, that is not the main focus. Our intention is to keep each consultant informed of the others work, and to facilitate opportunities for collaboration where it makes sense.

The Project

We are looking to partner with a communications firm/consultant that will combine their expertise in developing brand messaging with a perspective firmly grounded in DEI/anti-racist principles and asset-based framing. The firm/consultant will help us refine how we talk about our work/programs to reflect our new 2021-2015 strategy, and help us present REDF’s vision for the future to our various target audiences in a way that is clear, compelling, differentiating, and most importantly, reflects our authentic intentions.

Establishing the right positioning for REDF in this charged environment will be critical. While REDF is not a “social justice” organization (i.e., our primary focus is not on organizing and activism), our work intersects with racial equity because, as a result of inequities stemming from policies and practices in housing, employment, and other spheres that have caused and exacerbated racial disparities over generations, roughly 75% of the people served by REDF partner ESEs are people of color. In the words of Carla Javits, our President & CEO, “Even when laws and political leadership changes, as a society we need organizations that carry out effective initiatives on the ground, in communities across this country. We need organizations and institutions like REDF and the ESEs we support that root their work in values like mutual respect and compassion and driving toward fairness and equity.”

REDF’s Target Audiences (who they are/what we want them to do)

Please click on links to review program details.

Development audience

- These are:
  - Current and prospective major and institutional donors
  - REDF’s Board of Directors and Advisory Council
    - We want them to support/champion REDF’s work

“Outreach” Audience (REDF programs that need to engage external audiences)

- **REDF Accelerator** (the bulk of our outreach efforts are here – qualified ESE’s that go through this program become eligible to be part of our growth portfolio (more money/advisory services) and access to our other programs).
  - These are prospective participants of the program
    - We want them to apply to the program/champion it/REDF’s work

- **LA:RISE**
  - Current and prospective partners in LA:RISE – employment social enterprises, support providers, workforce development agencies
    - We want LA:RISE members to be effective, active partners and employment social enterprise champions
  - Government agencies that provide the funding and the employers that hire LA:RISE graduates
We want government agencies to fund LA:RISE, and employers to hire our graduates

**REDF Impact Investing Fund**
- These are prospective borrowers from for-and non-profit ESEs.
  - We want them to contact us for more information
  - Apply for a loan through RIIF

**REDF Community** (not on website yet – because this is for our practitioner audience, may just live on REDFworkshop.org)
- REDF Community is made up of leaders/staff who work at the ESEs we currently partner with or have partnered with/supported in the past including: REDF grants (portfolio and project grants), loan recipients (via RIIF – REDF Impact Investing Fund), REDF Accelerator ( alum or current), and contracted employment social enterprise partners of LA:RISE.
  - We want them to feel that they are part of something larger than their own organization, be highly engaged with REDF including providing us with key reporting data we need to monitor impact/improve our work, and actively seek connections with other ESEs in the community, provide referrals for REDF Programs (Accelerator, RIIF, LA:RISE).

**Farber Program**
- These are a prospective participants and alumni of the program
  - We want them to apply to the program
  - As they progress in their careers (which we hope will be focused on social impact), we want them to stay connected, champion the program, ESEs, and REDF.

**REDF Policy**
- Federal, state, and local policymakers
  - We want them to allocate funds to and promote the growth of employment social enterprise and to increase economic opportunity for enterprise employees.

**Deliverables**

- A tested, refined, and robust brand messaging framework that is grounded solidly in DEI/asset framing principles which will form the foundation for how we communicate the new strategy (with our DEI/anti-racism work authentically incorporated) to our respective target audiences. The framework should include:
  - REDF brand positioning, brand personality, possible refinement of REDF’s mission, vision, and values (see appendix for current language)
  - Key messages that also include a positioning and description for each of our programmatic areas

Other communications elements we need as part of this proposal:
- Elevator pitch
- Editorial style guide – that provides messaging guidance
- New Strategy FAQ
• Advice on REDF’s perceptual pain points - where we might need to put more marketing muscle in order to counter and/or strengthen perceptions (see “Some questions on our minds” section below)

The communications elements REDF’s mark/com team will develop from this framework include website copy and possible changes to our navigation (to ensure we present our content in the most user-friendly way), pitch deck language, REDF FAQ, updated boilerplate, email welcome series, internal one-pagers for staff that describe the programs and eligibility, possibly an external version of these ones pagers, and a variety of other internal messaging.

Some of the questions on our minds:

1. **Positioning**: Reflecting our history/approach, REDF positions itself as a venture philanthropy. Do our respective target audiences understand what that means? Does that term come with perceptual baggage that calls into question the authenticity of our vision as well as our work to meaningfully integrate DEI/anti-racism efforts throughout our work/grantmaking? Does it need to change given the changed landscape? REDF is also an intermediary but we don’t use that language because it’s jargoney. However, we have heard from our donors/funders that it’s a strong/important differentiator that they feel is valuable. Should we consider it?

2. **Bi-partisan appeal**. One of REDF’s strengths is that we have a mission that “everyone” can get behind. All people, regardless of political persuasions, understand that a job “provides so much more than a paycheck.” But as REDF works to authentically position our work in the current environment, is this bi-partisan appeal still an achievable aim?

3. **Naming the Sector**: REDF invests in a special type of social enterprise focused on employment - “employment social enterprise” (ESE). We’ve been working to build this term because it’s a key differentiator for us, but the organizations/businesses we partner with don’t all use it (which poses a challenge in our outreach work) and we don’t dictate that they do. Should we? Or, given the dramatically-changed economic and social environment, do we need to rethink the way we define, write, and talk about this sector (see What We Do and Why We Do It).

4. **Wages and Outcomes**. Many of the people ESE’s serve are striving to develop the skills/behaviors/experience needed to succeed in the workforce. When they leave the ESE they often are working in jobs that are more entry level but ideally, provide an opportunity to progress. On average, people who leave the ESE programs we support are earning 123% of the minimum wage. Also, reflecting the systemic barriers that people of color face, their outcomes, on average, are not as strong. To what extent does that reality run counter to our vision of economic inclusion and/or provide potential critics with reason to question our effectiveness/authenticity?

5. **Competition for Jobs**: We don’t know to what extent employers who were hiring from nontraditional/barriered populations and who were embracing their potential as positive change makers will continue to do so in the current economy. But we do know, with 30 million Americans collecting unemployment benefits, the competition for jobs is going to be fierce. Our ESE employees have been and will likely continue to lose ground so while our messaging needs to be evergreen, the “why care” part of our messaging needs to be even more compelling.

6. **About those Employers**. Employers were a target audience in our last five-year strategy, but are not a main for 2021-2025 for the following reasons:
   a. Because job placement is such a key part of the ESE model, we have found that ESEs do a better job at developing employer relationships than REDF is able to.
b. As part of the advisory services/technical assistance REDF provides to our ESEs, we will support them as they educate and cultivate employer relationships that will result in a more inclusive work environment and advancement opportunities for their beneficiaries. REDF Community will create space for ESEs to collaborate with each other and co-create effective employer strategies.

7. Our impact data. Does it still make the case?

Budget

We would appreciate a non-binding best estimate of what you think it would take to achieve the deliverables. Feel free to provide a range of costs and/or to itemize the options that you think we should consider.

At minimum, responses to this RFP should include:

- Qualifications/why you are interested in this project
- Team that will work on this project and how their expertise aligns
- How you’d approach this project – the research you’d need to do, people you’d need to interview, deliverables and timeline
- Cost range
- Timing range – when can you start/when might you finish
- Relevant work samples
- References

Contact and Timing for Proposal Submissions

REDF is committed to a policy of equitable treatment and opportunity in its relations with consultants and potential consultants. REDF encourages proposal submissions from organizations led by and/or composed of individuals who are representative of the diverse communities REDF serves.

- Proposals are due by September 18, 2020 by 5PM PST. Our aim is to conduct interviews with the finalists the week of September 28th and make a decision the week of October 5th.
- Please send your questions and submissions to Lori Warren, Director of Marketing & Communications. lwarren@redf.org.

Thank you for your interest in partnering with REDF. We look forward to hearing from you.
APPENDIX
An elevator pitch is a brief response to a basic question – in our case, “What is REDF and what do you do?” The premise being, after you answer that question the listener will become intrigued enough to respond, “Tell me more.” The trip from the first to the top floor provides that opportunity. The language provided here is meant as a guideline. Please feel free to customize it to suit the situation and your speaking/writing style.

**1ST FLOOR—WHAT’S REDF?**

REDF (Roberts Enterprise Development Fund) is a venture philanthropy that invests exclusively in social enterprise businesses that employ and empower people overcoming barriers to work.

REDF advances the field by:

- Providing capital in the form of grants and loans, and specialized advisory services
- Developing current and future leaders (REDF Accelerator, Farber Program for MBA students)
- Integrating employment social enterprise into the workforce development system (LA:RISE)
- Developing and championing supportive public policies (e.g. Employment for All Fund)
- Sharing knowledge (REDFworkshop.org)
- Using data to measure and increase our impact, and build the evidence base

REDF was founded, and our board of accomplished leaders is chaired by George R Roberts, co-founder of KKR, a leading global investment firm.

**2ND FLOOR—WHAT CHALLENGE IS REDF WORKING TO SOLVE?**

Despite low unemployment rates, millions of people who want to work are shut out of the income, networks, and stability that jobs offer due to circumstances and systemic barriers which are difficult to overcome alone.

This includes people with histories of incarceration, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and young people who are not in school or working. The valuable contributions they can make go unrealized, with costly cycles of incarceration and homelessness often the result.

All people want to take care of themselves and their families and contribute their skills and talents to our country and the economy.

Employment social enterprise is a cost-effective, evidence-backed model that provides that pathway.
3RD FLOOR—TELL ME MORE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT SOCIAL ENTERPRISE.

Employment social enterprises are mission-driven, revenue-generating businesses that sell products and services in the competitive marketplace. They employ people striving to overcome high unemployment barriers, providing paying, transitional jobs, and on-the-job training so their employees earn an income while they implement what they’ve learned in real time—building skills, confidence, and a work history.

In addition to a paying job and hard and soft skills training, supportive services are an essential part of this model. Housing assistance and counseling, for example, help employees stabilize their lives. When employees are ready, social enterprises help them find good jobs and provide continuing support to help them stay employed. And because social enterprises reinvest their profits in their businesses so they can serve more people, they require less outside funding, and are more sustainable.

4TH FLOOR—WHAT’S THE IMPACT?

Since 1997, REDF has supported 201 employment social enterprises in 30 states around the country. These businesses have earned $886 million in revenue and employed over 42,000 people (and counting).

This investment in social enterprise pays off for society—$2.23 in benefits for every $1.00 invested. The broader impact is in lives transformed, as people find not just work, but hope, pride, belonging, and a path to self-sufficiency. When people work, we leverage all the talent available to our country. Families and communities are stronger—and so is our entire society.

5th Floor—One Success Story (among tens of thousands)

After spending 15 years in and out of prison, Pablo began working at REDF partner Goodwill Silicon Valley, determined to turn his life around. Four promotions later, he is the Director of Goodwill’s Re-Entry Services, providing mentorship and hope to hundreds of men and women each year who’ve served their time and are ready to start a new chapter. Paying it forward in a big way, Pablo also sits on numerous community commissions, committees, and boards, using his experience to help create a more effective and humane criminal justice system.

TOP FLOOR—HOW CAN I HELP /GET INVOLVED?

INDIVIDUALS/DONORS:

- Support REDF and our ESE partners (redf.org/support-redf/)
- Join our Advisory Council (redf.org/about/advisory-council/)
- Purchase ESE gifts (socialenterprisegiftguide.com/)
- Join our mailing list (redf.org)

CORPORATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS:
• Procure goods/services from ESE (visit the Grants and Accelerator pages on REDF’s website for some options)
• Get in touch with J.D. Greer, V.P. of Developing & Marketing Communications: jgreer@redf.org

CA POLICYMAKERS:
• Support the Employment for All Fund (redfworkshop.org/policy/employment-for-all-fund/)

FOOTNOTES
2 Examples of goods/services: aerospace manufacturing, gourmet catering, landscape design, con/deconstruction, solar installation, jewelry, community beautification, website development, thrift stores, dog treats. See REDF.org/grants for a full list of industries.
3 Examples of supportive services: mental health and addiction counseling, assistance with housing, child care, and financial literacy classes.
4 Impact numbers are updated quarterly. Check redf.org/the-impact/ for the latest.
ADDITIONAL BRAND MESSAGING COMPONENTS

BRAND VALUES

Work is a core American value, and a big part of our identity as people. We believe that people who are striving to overcome adversity, including those who have historically faced discrimination, deserve the opportunity to work and contribute their skills and talents to our country and our economy.

MISSION

REDF invests in and advises high-impact social enterprises to employ and empower people overcoming barriers to employment.

VISION

REDF is working to build a better, more inclusive society where all people have the jobs and the support they need—and the pride, purpose, and path to self-sufficiency they deserve.

BRAND POSITIONING

REDF is the only venture philanthropy in the county that invests exclusively in employment social enterprises that help people striving to overcome employment barriers get jobs, keep jobs, and build a better life.

BRAND PROMISE

To use a venture philanthropy approach for good - to strengthen and grow the social enterprise movement so that people who are working so hard to improve their lives have the support, and the good jobs they need to succeed.

BRAND PERSONALITY

- Dedicated/determined
- Highly collaborative
- High-achieving /committed to excellence
- Humble
- Optimistic
- Respectful
- Honest/trustworthy
- Fair
- Empathetic
- Aware/informed about the world around us, and how that impacts the people we serve
- Believe in a growth-mindset