

Memorandum

TO: Fox Cities Transit Commission

FROM: Ron McDonald, General Manager

DATE: October 27, 2025

RE: Award Recommendation for Public Relations & Marketing Services

BACKGROUND

Valley Transit utilizes a contractor to develop and execute strategies in support of its overall marketing program. This includes assistance with public relations, crisis communication, social media management, media buys, advertising/creative materials, website support, market research, strategy and other related support. The primary goals of Valley Transit's marketing program are to increase ridership, support employee recruitment, improve the public's perception of transit and increase brand awareness. The current contractor for this service is Red Shoes, Inc.

Valley Transit staff drafted a request for proposal (RFP) document to solicit proposals from interested firms. The final RFP document was posted to the public on September 10, 2025. The solicitation was posted on Valley Transit's website and the State of Wisconsin's VendorNet system. Proposals were due on October 8, 2025. Four proposals were received: Affirm (Pewaukee, WI); Red Shoes, Inc. (Appleton, WI); A&M Financial LLC (Laurel, MD); and Yellow Dog Creative (Marquette, MI).

ANALYSIS

An evaluation team was assembled to review the submitted written proposals. Each proposal was evaluated based on the vendor's experience/qualifications, capacity & technical approach, and project understanding/proposal. The RFP established an annual budget of \$50,000 for this service. All proposers submitted a summary of services that would address the scope of work. Proposers also submitted sample creative from previous campaigns and references.

After considering the written proposals and an oral presentation, the evaluation committee unanimously concluded that Affirm had proposed the best service for Valley Transit. In summary, Affirm had the most experience providing similar public relations and marketing services at other transit systems in Wisconsin and Midwest. Affirm is a full-service marketing firm with internal resources for creative, social media management, crisis communication/PR, website hosting, website development, media buying and market research. Affirm's presentation was well-organized. It clearly showed their company's strengths and an understanding of Valley Transit's core needs.

Janesville Transit System has been working with Affirm since 2024 and provided a very positive reference regarding their overall experience with Affirm.

FISCAL IMPACT

Valley Transit's 2026 budget includes \$50,000 for contracted marketing and public relations services. The project will have a total year-one fiscal impact of \$50,000.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend authorization for Valley Transit to enter into a 5-year contract with Affirm to provide public relations and marketing services. If approved, the tentative contract start date is January 1, 2026.